SERMONS

FOR

The Sundays and Chief Festivals

OF

THE ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR

WITH TWO COURSES OF

LENTEN SERMONS

AND

A TRIDUUM FOR THE FORTY HOURS

BY

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Rendered from the German

BY

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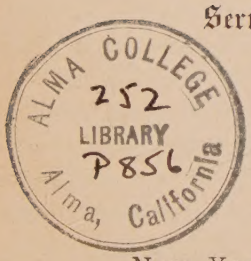
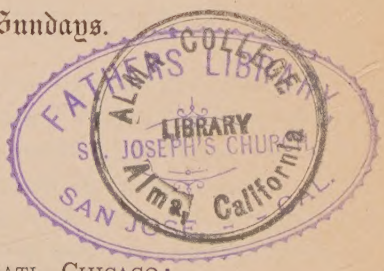
VOL. I.

Sermons for Sundays.





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PREFACE.

THE author of these sermons has been known for many years among his own countrymen, at home and abroad, as one of the first preachers and lecturers of his day. Nor is he altogether a stranger to the English-speaking priesthood of this country, many of whom still remember, and speak in high terms of praise of his retreats to the clergy. For years the infirmities of old age have narrowed his sphere of action. It is to this involuntary leisure we owe the publication of these volumes.

While the author might have given to the public courses of learned lectures and powerful missionary sermons, he could not be prevailed upon to do so, but chose rather to devote his time to the publication of such sermons as he considered would reflect less credit on himself, but prove of greater utility to those for whom they were intended.

The purport and plan of the sermons are best explained in the author's own words. "These sermons," he says, "are intended, in the first instance, for those whose vocation it is to preach the word of God, but whose multifarious duties leave them little time for preparation. For such, it is hoped, they will prove a welcome aid. The reader will find them, as a rule, presented in an easy and popular form; and, with all their brevity, he will find them to contain ample matter for a sermon

[he might have said, for several sermons] of ordinary length. It was my endeavor throughout to follow a simple and strictly logical disposition, and to bring it out with the greatest possible clearness. Such is the grouping of thoughts that it will be an easy matter for the preacher, after careful perusal, to reproduce the substance of any sermon in the form most congenial to his taste."

Though addressed, in the first place, to the clergy, these sermons, owing to their eminently instructive and practical character, will also afford useful and edifying reading matter to the laity. In fact, the translator knows no spiritual nutriment better suited to the wants of the faithful at large. The comments of the literary press of Germany have been unanimous in praise of the original; and, what is perhaps the best recommendation, the circulation of the work has, in a short time, far exceeded the average of works of this kind.

It was the translator's aim to make the work equally useful and practical for the English-speaking clergy as the original has proved to be for the priests of German tongue. If he has succeeded to some extent in lightening the heavy burden of many a hard-worked priest, even within the narrow range of his own acquaintance, and thus contributed a mite towards the fruitful preaching of the Gospel, he will consider his toil more than amply repaid.

TRANSLATOR.

CANISIUS COLLEGE, BUFFALO, N. Y.,
ON THE FEAST OF ST. IGNATIUS, JULY 31, 1889.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

PAGE

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—Sanctification of Advent - - 11
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—Penance - - - - - - 20
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—The Presence of God - - - 28
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—Delay of Conversion - - - 37
SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY.—The Incarnation - - - - 46
SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR.—Discontent with Divine Providence 53
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Duties of Children - 61
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—Marriage - - - - 71
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Fruits of Holy Communion - - - - - - - - - - - 79
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Proximate Occasion of Sin - - - - - - - - - - - 88
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—Scandal - - - - 97
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Church - - - 105
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.—Envy - - - - - - - 116
SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.—The Hearing of the Word of God - 124
QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.—Dangerous Reading - - - - 135
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.—Temptations - - - - - 145
SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.—Heaven - - - - - 153
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.—Impurity - - - - - 161
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.—Christian Mortification - - - 170
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT.—Habitual Sin - - - - - 178
PALM SUNDAY.—The Following of Christ - - - - - 186
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Confession - - - - - 196
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Salvation - - - - 209
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Unequal Distribution of Earthly Goods - - - - - - - - - - 219
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—The Workings of Divine Grace 229
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Why our Prayers are not always heard - - - - - - - - - - 238

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Human Respect - - - 246
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Loss of Grace - - 255
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—The Virtue of Penance - 264
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Good Intention - - 273
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass - - - - - - - - - - - 281
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Lukewarmness - - 292
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Faith and Good Works 299
EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Alms-giving - - - 306
NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Remorse of Conscience - - 315
TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Perfect Contrition - - 323
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Healing of the Deaf and Dumb - - - - - - - - - - 333
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Slander - - - 342
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST—Effects of Faith - 350
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Injustice - - 359
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Sin - - - - 367
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Avarice - - - 378
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Attributes of the Love of God - - - - - - - - - 386
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Venial Sin - - 395
NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTERPENTECOST.—The Belief in Eternal Punishment - - - - - - - - - - 407
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Zeal for the Honor of our Religion - - - - - - - - - 415
TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Forgiveness of Injuries - - - - - - - - - - - 424
TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Defacement of the Image of God - - - - - - - - - 434
TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—Preparation for Death - - - - - - - - - - - 442
LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST.—The Last Judgment - - 450

First Sunday in Advent.

SANCTIFICATION OF ADVENT.

"The night is past, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."—Rom. xiii. 12.

DEARLY beloved brethren, when the Church in to-day's epistle addresses to us these words of the Apostle, her purpose is no other than to exhort us to enter in the proper spirit on the new ecclesiastical year, which begins on this day. By the ecclesiastical year is understood the period of twelve months within which the Church, in accordance with her divine mission, reviews with us the work of Redemption by means of holy seasons and festivals, applying at the same time the treasures of its fruits to our souls. The sacred year is divided into three principal seasons: Christmas, which commemorates the love of God, the Father, in sending His only begotten Son; Easter, which puts before us the love of God, the Son, displayed in the consummation of the work of Redemption; Whitsuntide, which shows forth the love of God, the Holy Ghost, who communicates to our souls the fruits of the Redemption, and teaches us to use them for our salvation. Each of the festivals, in which these three seasons culminate, is preceded by a time of preparation and followed by a supplementary solemnity, in

order to make its spiritual fruits more abundant and lasting.

Advent is the time of preparation for the feast of the Nativity. It commemorates the four thousand years of the Ancient Covenant, which intervened between the fall of man and the coming of the Redeemer. It extends over a period of from three to four weeks, always including four Sundays. On entering upon this holy season, therefore, I considered it most befitting the occasion, and in accordance with your wishes, that I should take for my subject *the sanctification of Advent*, and especially try to impress upon you the motives for spending this time in a manner salutary for your souls.

Three motives in particular should animate us thus to sanctify this holy season: the express wish of our holy Mother, the *Church*, our *gratitude* to God, and our own *interest*. These three motives will form the subject and division of my discourse.

I. THE WISH OF THE CHURCH.

The sanctification of advent consists in using this holy time fruitfully to prepare ourselves by prayer and penance for the approaching feast of Christmas. To this preparation the Church, in the name of Christ, exhorts us in various ways.

1. *By the voice of her priests.* For, as once the forerunner of Jesus Christ preached to the Jews, so the Church continually, during this holy time, addresses to us the words: "Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). How often do these words resound from our pulpits during the holy season of Advent? Are not all sermons preached during this time directed to this end: to arouse you from the sleep of sin, and to stimulate you to fervor in the work

of your salvation; in other words, to exhort you to prepare yourselves worthily for the coming of the Redeemer? Woe to us, should those exhortations, addressed to us in the name of the Church, and in the name of Jesus Christ Himself, by the mouth of the priest, pass unheeded, and we shut our hearts against the grace of God!

2. *By the special character* which the Church has given to the season of Advent, she exhorts us to a careful preparation for the coming of the Redeemer. All the lessons which she selects from the Holy Scriptures during this time, especially the epistles and gospels of the Sundays; all her prayers; the Masses prescribed for certain days; besides, the prohibition of the solemn celebration of marriage; the fasts prescribed in most places; the custom universally observed in the Church of abstaining from worldly amusements during this time—all this is ordained by the Church in view of the Nativity of the Son of God, and urgently invites us to prepare ourselves with prayer and penance for this great event.

With regard to the *epistles and gospels* in particular, the Church at the very outset, in to-day's epistle, as you have heard in the words of my text, exhorts us to put off all that is sinful, and put on what is holy and pleasing to our blessed Lord. And to add greater force to this exhortation in the gospel of the day, she lays before us the terrible ordeal of the Last Judgment. Thus she seems to bring home to us the question, whether it is not better for us now to prepare ourselves for the meek and merciful coming of Our Lord, than, once laden with sin, to appear before Him as our offended and all-just Judge. In the epistle of the second Sunday, our attention is directed to the consoling promises of God in regard to our Redemption, in

order to induce us joyfully to prepare our hearts to receive Him with true sentiments of love and penitence. The gospel of the same day, which sets before us the example of St. John the Baptist, has the same object. In a similar manner the epistles and gospels of the following Sundays with increasing force dispose us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Redeemer.

The nearer the time of visitation approaches, the more eloquent becomes the language of the Church, and the more touching the expression of her desire. For seven days before the Nativity she impresses upon us, with ever growing warmth, in the *solemn antiphons*, the joyous message of the Lord's coming. The first of these antiphons introduces Jesus Christ as the infinite "Wisdom," which, with love and power, disposes all things from eternity; the second, as the "Lord and Leader of the Chosen People," from whom has emanated the holy Law; the third, as the "Off-shoot of the Root of Jesse," who in the Cross has set up a sign for us in which alone is salvation; the fourth, as the "Key of David," which opens the gates of heaven for the just; the fifth, as the "morning-dawn of salvation," which brings the light of the world; the sixth, as the "King of nations," who wishes to unite all men in His heavenly kingdom; the seventh, as the "Emanuel, God with us," from whom alone salvation cometh. With these invocations, which contain the entire mystery of the Incarnation, the Church closes the holy season of Advent. She exhorts us, therefore, not only by the mouth of her priests, but also by the special character of this holy time, to sanctify this sacred season; nay, more—

3. By the very fact that she gives this holy season the *first place* in the ecclesiastical year, she impresses upon us the same lesson; for by this fact she manifestly shows what importance she attaches to this time

of preparation, and how eager she is to transform us into new men, conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Now, if the Church, our holy Mother, as we have seen, so earnestly exhorts us to sanctify the holy season of Advent, what must we think of those who give no heed to her exhortations, but perhaps even profane this holy time by sinful amusements? Such Christians, who have no regard for the voice of the Church, are, to say the least, not the good children of a good mother, but lukewarm souls, whose hearts are estranged to all sentiments of generosity and thankfulness. But it is not only our thankfulness and obedience to the Church of God, which should incite us to a befitting sanctification of Advent, but also—

II. OUR GRATITUDE TOWARDS GOD.

1. The Incarnation of the Son of God, which we celebrate on the feast of Christmas, is a favor for which we can never sufficiently render thanks to Almighty God. It is the highest exaltation of man, by the profoundest self-abasement of the Son of God. The almighty and eternal God, before whom, according to the words of the prophets, the mountains quake, and the sun grows pale, and the earth is changed into smoke, and the whole universe falls back into its nothingness—that infinite God comes clothed with our infirmities: the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, in the form of a slave; He who holds the universe in His hand, as a weak and helpless child! Is that not an infinite humiliation? And is it not by this self-humiliation of the Son of God, that we, from being slaves, have become freedmen, from slaves of Satan, have become children and heirs of God, and partakers of the divine nature? Is not, then, the Incarnation of the Son of God truly our highest elevation, effected by the profoundest

humiliation of the Son of God? And can we ever return due thanks to Almighty God for this favor? Does not, therefore, the debt of gratitude you owe to God demand that you celebrate that day, on which the birth of the Son of God in the flesh is commemorated, in a manner that is truly pleasing to God?

2. But can we do this without duly *preparing ourselves* for this celebration? Certainly not; for what does it mean to celebrate Christmas in a worthy manner? Is it, perhaps, enough to assist devoutly at divine service on that day? No, my brethren, that is, indeed, required, but it is by no means sufficient to reap the fruits of this holy season; besides this, it is also necessary that the interior state of our souls is rightly disposed, that we are in such a disposition as to enable God to impart His graces to us. To put himself in this condition, the sinner must be converted to God, and therefore apply the means of a thorough conversion; and the just man must endeavor to divest himself of all attachment to venial sin; for venial as well as mortal sin prevents God from enriching our souls with His graces according to His desires. Therein consists the preparation of which we speak. All, the just man as well as the sinner, must, therefore, sanctify the holy season of Advent, if, according to the duty of gratitude they owe to God, they would celebrate the feast of Christmas in a befitting and salutary manner.

Were it not, then, the blackest ingratitude on our part if we did not make use of this time to prepare ourselves for the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ? What?—to borrow the expression of St. Bernard—What? the Son of God deigns to descend from on high to enlighten us in our darkness, to deliver us from the arms of death, and raise us to communion with God, and we should not lift up our eyes to the divine Light,

which shines around us; we should not allow ourselves to be raised up by the powerful arm which the all-merciful Lord extends to us!

Therefore make use of this holy time, and prepare yourselves by prayer and penance for the coming of the Saviour; for this, as it is the ardent wish of the Church and a debt of gratitude we owe to God, is also

III. OUR OWN GREATEST INTEREST.

1. Our *spiritual welfare*, beloved brethren, the well-being of our souls, depends not on the goods of this world; not on honors, riches, and pleasures; not on the natural gifts with which God has adorned our souls; but solely on the supernatural graces, which He is pleased to grant us. The richer we are in grace before God, however destitute we may be of earthly goods, and however limited in natural gifts, the more perfect is the state of our souls, in which consists our spiritual well-being. Now the Christmas festival offers us a most favorable opportunity of enriching our souls with supernatural graces. The reason is, because God on this occasion is particularly inclined to lavish upon us the treasures of His graces. Whence such liberality on the part of God at this season?

It is on account of the *birth of the Son of God*, which is celebrated at that time. Almighty God has such complacency in the Incarnation of His Son, that it is in view of this mystery alone that He has been moved to communicate His grace to us. To this mystery we ultimately owe all graces which we have received from God. The sacraments, 'tis true, are the channels of grace; but these channels are supplied through the mystery of the Incarnation. If, therefore, by the aid of the sacraments, we are enabled to rise from our sins, to subdue our passions, and surmount the obstacles

to our salvation; and if by their aid we have been cleansed from original sin, freed from the slavery of Satan, and raised to the dignity of children and heirs of God—all this we owe finally to the Incarnation of the Son of God. This being the case, since this mystery is so precious in the eyes of God, will He not be particularly disposed to open to us the treasury of His graces on the day which is dedicated to the joyous commemoration of this mystery of His love?

Besides, our *prayer* on that day is not isolated as on ordinary occasions, but it ascends to the throne of God *united* with the prayers of all the faithful over the whole world. On this day, as on all the principal festivals commemorating the mysteries of the Redemption, the Church collects all the prayers, and sighs, and holy aspirations of her children, who are scattered over the whole earth, forming one family of God, and confidently presents them as a homage before the throne of the Most High. But are we not more likely to be heard by Almighty God and receive the graces of salvation more abundantly, when we unite in common to invoke our common Father? Certainly; our blessed Lord Himself assures us with the words: "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in their midst" (Matt. xviii. 20). What power, then, must be in the united prayer of all the faithful, thus gathered in the holy name of Jesus!

2. However, though it is undoubtedly certain, from the reasons so far given, that God is particularly disposed to enrich us with His graces at this holy season, yet in vain do we hope with the faithful servants of God to have a part in the dispensation of His graces, unless our hearts are *duly prepared* to receive them. "For," says St. Cæsarius, Bishop of Arles, "though Christ, Our Lord, after His passion arose from the

dead, and ascended into heaven, yet He observes, as we know, each of His servants, and takes careful notice whether he endeavors, without avarice and ill-will, without pride and luxury, to prepare himself for the celebration of His Nativity, and dispose himself rightly for this occasion. And in proportion to the good works with which He finds each one adorned, will He dispense to him the grace of His mercy." Since, therefore, as I have shown you, the grace which flows from the mystery of the Incarnation is inexhaustible; since the love which it manifests is infinite, and the goodness of God is without bounds, ever ready to enrich us with its graces, provided we are rightly disposed, it is evident that it is altogether in our power, on the holy feast of Christmas, to obtain the fulness of God's grace. We need only prepare ourselves worthily; in other words, we need only sanctify the holy season of Advent.

If, then, as you have seen, all those motives—the eager desire of our holy Mother, the Church, the debt of gratitude for the ineffable benefit of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and your own highest interests—combine to urge you to the worthy sanctification of Advent, will you any longer hesitate to comply with such an important duty? No, beloved brethren; I cannot think so. I know you too well to entertain such a thought. I know that you love your holy Mother, the Church, with your whole heart; I know your gratitude towards your Saviour; I know that you are eagerly concerned for the welfare of your souls. Therefore I am convinced that you have all on this day made the generous resolve, with prayer and penance to sanctify this holy season. Be faithful to this resolve, and the Christmas festival will be for you at the same time a source of abundant graces, and a pledge of future never-ending happiness. Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent.

PENANCE.

"But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?"—Matt. xi. 8.

THESE words of our blessed Lord have been spoken to direct our attention to the austerity of St. John the Baptist, to commend his penance to us, and to animate us to imitate his example. Since, then, the holy season upon which we have entered, in like manner, calls us to penance, and there is no better means of preparing ourselves for the coming of the Saviour than by renewing ourselves in the spirit of penance, I shall to-day make this virtue of *penance* the subject of my discourse, calling your attention—

1. To the *necessity;*
2. To the *attributes* of true penance.

I. THE NECESSITY OF PENANCE.

1. Penance is necessary, first of all, as a *satisfaction* for our sins. In the sacrament of penance, it is true, our sins are forgiven us, but, as a rule, not the total punishment due to our sins. The justice of God demands satisfaction. Therefore, after the remission of the guilt of sin, and of the eternal punishment due to it, there commonly still remains the temporal punishment, either to be atoned for in this life by patience in suffering and voluntary penance, or to be expiated in the cleansing fire of Purgatory.

The chosen people of God had once, by adoring the *golden calf*, committed the abominable crime of idolatry, so that God in His justice resolved to exterminate them from the face of the earth. Such was the punishment which God had set upon their transgression. But at the prayer of Moses He remitted them the impending sentence. Now, was all punishment remitted them by this very fact? Not by any means; for, by express command of God, Moses had to deliver up to execution twenty-three thousand of the several millions of which the people of God was composed (Exod. xxxii.).

Hast thou, my dear friend, not been guilty of similar idolatry? Hast thou not, perhaps, on the altar of thy heart set up for adoration the golden calf of the goods and honors of this world, and the degrading lusts of the flesh? Canst thou wonder, then, that Almighty God, after remitting the eternal punishment due to thy sins, through the ministry of the priest in the sacrament of penance, still demands from thee satisfaction of His justice by self-inflicted chastisement and works of penance? "It is not enough," says St. Augustine, "that a man amends his life and abandons sin, to obtain perfect forgiveness of his sins also in regard to the punishment; but he must also make satisfaction to God for the offences committed, by penal works, by true humility, by a total oblation of the heart, and by much alms-giving."

But, some one may ask, have we not *indulgences*, whereby to cancel wholly, or in part, the temporal punishment of sin? Why, then, should we afflict ourselves with penance, since we may so easily satisfy the divine justice? True it is that indulgences, wholly or in part, cancel the temporal punishment of our sins; but only then when we gain them. But those who

speak in this way will hardly ever gain an indulgence; for, in order to gain an indulgence, plenary or partial, the conditions under which it has been granted must be exactly fulfilled, and that with an humble and contrite heart. But those of whom we speak are lukewarm Christians, who do not possess the spirit of penance, who will do no violence to themselves, who consequently, dreading the penitential works prescribed, little concern themselves about the gaining of indulgences. Penance is, therefore, necessary as a satisfaction for our sins. It is also necessary—

2. As a *preservative* against the relapse into sin. He who neglects to do penance will soon relapse into his former sins. The sacrament of penance does not, at the same time that it cancels the guilt of sin, destroy all its effects upon the soul. For sin obscures the understanding, weakens the will, arouses the passions, and thus is the cause of many and grievous temptations. Of this fact the royal prophet assures us in the penitential psalms, where he acknowledges that he experienced all those effects. And does not your own experience confirm the fact? For, whence comes, for instance, that ill-temper, which causes some people at the slightest provocation to break out into abuse, and blasphemy, and imprecation? Has it not often its cause in former sins of anger, hatred, and revenge? And whence those continued and violent temptations against the angelic virtue of purity? Whence, if not from former habitual sins, long since confessed and forgiven? And, to be brief, is this not the case with almost all sinful inclinations? The Holy Scripture assures us of this, when it says: "Concerning forgiven sins, be not without fear (Ecclus. v. 5). By these words the Holy Ghost would evidently remind us of the pernicious effects which sin produces in

the soul, and warn us against the temptations of which it is the source.

What must we do, then, to withstand those temptations and to preserve ourselves against the relapse into sin? We must have recourse to penance, which is directly opposed to those effects of sin and counteracts their influence. For the Council of Trent says expressly: "The works of penance heal the effects of sin, and, by the practice of the opposite virtues, remove the vicious inclinations, which are the consequences of a sinful life" (Sess. xiv., de pœn., c. 8). If, then, you would become master of your evil passions, and not relapse into your former sins, rely neither upon your good resolutions, nor upon your practices of devotion; for these, though good and necessary, are by no means sufficient. Rather follow the example of St. Paul, who unceasingly practised works of penance; and that not only, as one might think, to become holier, but also to avoid sin and work out his salvation. He himself bears testimony to the fact, when he says: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become reprobate" (I. Cor. ix. 27).

3. Penance is, finally, necessary *to lead a Christian life*. For, in order to lead a Christian life, it is not sufficient to have satisfied for our sins, and not to relapse into them. We must also faithfully fulfil all those duties which are incumbent upon us as Christians; in other words, we must keep the commandments of God and the Church, and perform the duties of our state; which we evidently cannot do without doing violence to ourselves in things otherwise allowed, that is, without practising penance. Hence follows the absolute impossibility of saving our souls without penance. Or, can we save our souls without leading a Christian life?

Can we lead a true Christian life without fulfilling the duties of a Christian? Can we, again, fulfil those duties without penance?

The same conclusion follows with sufficient evidence from the words of the Apostle which I have just quoted. For if a saint like the Apostle feared without penance to become an outcast, can we, poor sinners, reasonably hope without penance to enter the kingdom of heaven? But let us hear the words of Our Saviour, which leave no doubt of this truth. He began His divine teaching with the words: "Do penance; for the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17), whence He clearly shows that penance is necessary for salvation. For His words amount to this: the time is now near at hand when by My death I shall open the gates of heaven for you; therefore do penance. And why? Doubtless for the very reason that penance is the only way which leads to heaven, and is, therefore, absolutely necessary for salvation. By these words, therefore, our blesssed Lord would have us understand that we should not look upon our salvation as a mere gift of God, as it is in the case of innocent children, but that we should obtain it at the same time as a reward, and that we can render ourselves worthy of this reward only by penance. Therefore He says, in another place (Luke xiii. 5), in express terms: "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." "Take heed," says St. Chrysostom, "the command is given to all, no one excepted, of whatever sex, or condition, or character, or position he may be. Every one who wishes to be a true Christian and work out his salvation must walk on this way to his last end, and shall find no other" (Hom. 56 in Matt.). Penance is therefore absolutely necessary for salvation.

However, in order that this apparently harsh truth

may not discourage you, I shall now try to lay before you the attributes of penance. Thus you will see that it is not only possible, but even easy to do penance, at least for those who are of good will.

II. THE ATTRIBUTES OF PENANCE.

The attributes of penance are clearly hinted at by St. Augustine, when he defines the penitent man as "one who is angry with himself." Now, what does the angry man do? He reflects upon the injury done to him, and tries to revenge it. True, he has no right to do so towards his neighbor, for God says: "Revenge is Mine;" but he has the right and the duty to act thus towards himself. What, then, must the penitent sinner do? He must keep the offences, committed against God, clearly before his mind and avenge them upon himself.

1. We must *keep in mind the offences* committed against God, that is, our sins must be always before us. For, as the lively remembrance of sustained injury arouses wrath and hatred in the heart, so does the memory of our offences against God produce in us a horror for sin, which makes us carefully guard against it in future. It inspires us also with self-contempt and diffidence in our own strength, and thus preserves us in humility. This the enemy of our souls knows full well; and as he is concerned to keep the memory of sustained wrong always alive in our minds, to foster in us hatred against others, so he tries, by all means, to make us forget our offences against God, that thus the horror which we have conceived against sin in the sacrament of penance may vanish, and we may again return to our sins. Now, this continued remembrance of our sins, and the consequent contriteness of heart, is the inward penance, which, according

to the teaching of St. Thomas, should last to the end of our lives. That this first attribute of penance is possible for all, and entails no great difficulty for those who are of good will, needs no manner of proof.

2. The second feature of penance consists in this: that the sinner *chastises himself*, and thus avenges upon himself the offence committed against God. "Penance," says St. Augustine, "is a revenge which the sinner takes upon himself for the sins committed." In what does this revenge consist? Does God require of you, that, like St. John the Baptist, you withdraw into the desert, or that, in the midst of the world, you practise the penances and austerities of recluses? No; He is satisfied with less. He requires, above all, that you *bear patiently the sufferings* He is pleased to send you. Such are poor health, sickness, family troubles, differences with neighbors, losses, and the like. Instead of allowing yourselves to be carried away by impatience at such trials, you must accept them with patience and resignation to the will of God.

Besides those penances which Almighty God Himself imposes upon you, He requires, further, that you impose *voluntary penances* upon yourselves, namely, that you do those works which the duties of a Christian life demand. As Christians, you are not bound to lead a secluded life; but you are bound to flee dangerous associations and companionships. You must not do like many of our young people of both sexes, who seek the society and haunts where bad conversation against morals and religion is carried on, but you must be very careful with whom you associate. As Christians, you are not bound to spend whole days and nights in prayer, meditation, and pious reading; but you are bound to say your daily prayers devoutly, to hear, with devotion, an *entire* Mass on Sundays and

festivals of obligation, and not do like some unscrupulous Christians, who, on Sundays and feast-days, either hear no Mass at all, or come too late, or come without beads or prayer-book, to spend their time, not in prayer, but in the indulgence of vain and immodest curiosity. As Christians, you are not bound to give all your possessions to the poor; but you are bound, according to your means, to set apart something, at least, for the relief of the poor of Jesus Christ, to pay your just debts, and carefully to avoid all dishonesty. Finally, as Christians, you are not bound to emaciate your body with fasting and other austerities; but you are bound to observe the prescribed fasts and abstinences of the Church. Does such penance seem hard to you? Can an offended God require less of you than that you often reflect upon your sins, that you bear patiently the trials which He is pleased to send you, and that you earnestly endeavor faithfully to fulfil the duties which rest upon you as Christians?

From what you have heard on the attributes of penance, beloved brethren, you have doubtless perceived that to do penance means nothing more than to lead a truly Christian life. Hence follows, manifestly, that penance is the best preparation for the coming of Our Lord in the Nativity. But as it is our bounden duty, at all times and not merely at intervals, to lead a Christian life, it also follows that penance should be our constant companion. As our friend and faithful companion, let us now choose this truly Christian virtue; it will be our joy and support in life, our comfort in death, and our glorious crown in eternity. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

"There hath stood one in the midst of you, whom you know not." —John i. 26.

THESE words of the Baptist referred to the Jews, who paid no attention to Christ, though He stood in their midst. But we may justly apply them to ourselves. For, as Christ received no attention from the Jews, among whom He lived, Almighty God, who is always with us by His Omnipresence, is, sad to say, often neglected by us, as we often lose sight of His holy presence. This neglect on our part is much to be deplored, as we thereby violate a sacred duty, deprive ourselves of great advantages; and such neglect is, moreover, altogether inexcusable. In order, then, to put you on your guard against these grave disadvantages, I have determined to-day earnestly to exhort you to the practice of often recalling to mind the holy *presence of God.*

I shall, therefore, endeavor to lay before you:

1. The *duty;* 2. the *advantages;* 3. the *facility* of walking in the presence of God.

I. DUTY.

The duty of walking in the presence of God rests on two truths, which faith teaches us.

1. The first is that God is *everywhere present.* There is no place that is not sanctified by the presence of God; wherever we may be, we can say in truth, with the pa-

triarch Jacob: "Verily, the Lord is in this place" (Gen. xxviii. 16). If this is the case, if the whole world is the temple of God, does not the reverence due to the divine Majesty demand that, wherever we are, we should be mindful of the divine presence? Is this not a homage we owe to the immensity of God?

2. The second truth, upon which this duty rests, is, that the omnipresent God *sees all things*, according to the words of the Apostle: "Neither is there anything invisible in His sight; but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom our speech is" (Heb. iv. 13). Hence follows, evidently, that we, too, as far as possible, should never lose sight of God and should continually walk, as it were, under His eyes. Thus thought the royal prophet, David: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or, whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. cxxxviii. 7–10). And, beloved brethren, what was the practical conclusion which the Psalmist drew from this truth? It was no other than the duty always to walk in the presence of God. This life, therefore, in the continual presence of God is for all of us a strict and sacred duty. But what should still more urge us to walk in the presence of God are the great *advantages* connected with this practice.

II. ADVANTAGES.

The memory of the presence of God has two very great advantages. On the one hand, it preserves us from evil, checks us from sin; on the other hand, it urges us efficaciously to good works, to the practice of virtue.

1. *It checks us from sin.* To convince you of this truth, I wish to show you: (*a*) that, as long as we walk in the presence of God, we shall not easily fall into sin; and, (*b*) that, as soon as we lose sight of the presence of God, we may very easily fall into sin.

a. That we shall *not easily fall into sin*, as long as we are mindful of the presence of God, is beyond all doubt, as we find it repeatedly asserted in Holy Scripture and manifestly grounded in human nature itself.

You need only open the Scriptures at random to find innumerable proofs of this fact. Witness of this fact is the royal prophet, David, who says: "I set the Lord always in my sight; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be moved" (Ps. xv. 8). And elsewhere he says: "Seek ye the Lord and be strengthened; seek His face evermore" (Ps. civ. 4). In other words: always walk in the presence of God, and you shall be strong, and shall not yield to temptation. Witness is the chaste patriarch, Joseph. For, how did he repulse the solicitations of the wanton woman, who would seduce him to sin? By a lively faith in the presence of God. "How could I do this wicked thing," he said, "and sin against my God?" (Gen. xxxix. 9). Witness is the chaste Susanna. Two wicked men, who were judges of the people, had long waited for an occasion to seduce her, when alone, to the abominable crime of adultery. At last they found the long looked-for opportunity. And they said to her: "Behold, the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us . . . wherefore, consent to us. . .But if thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee." "Susanna sighed and said: I am straitened on every side; for if I do this, it is death to me; and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands." But she answered bravely and resolutely: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without do-

ing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (Dan. xiii. 20 sq.). It was, therefore, the thought of the divine presence which obtained for her the victory over death and sin.

The same fact, I said, is grounded in *human nature* itself. Man is by the very voice of nature checked from evil, when he knows that he is observed by others, unless he is so degraded as to be divested, as it were, of human nature and likened to the brute beast; he is afraid and ashamed to do before others what his conscience condemns. Therefore he commonly seeks the haunts of darkness for the dark deeds of sin. The mere presence of another is often sufficient to restrain him from the commission of an evil deed. This is a check which bountiful nature itself has put on rational man to keep him from evil. So it often happens that the presence of a person of respect and influence can tame the wildest passion of anger and subdue the most violent temptation.

Now, if the presence of a fellow-man affords such protection against sin, what must be the power and efficacy of the presence of God, if we bring it forcibly before our minds? For, must not a Christian be seized with holy awe and fear at the mere thought: God is here present and sees me; God, my Creator, whose property I am; God, my sovereign Lord, whom I am bound to obey and serve; God, my Father, who provides for me so lovingly; God, my Judge, to whom I owe the strictest account of all my actions, who at every moment can cast me into the abyss of hell? This God, on whom I totally depend, sees and observes me as clearly and distinctly, as if I were the only man on earth! He sees not only my actions, but also my thoughts and the most secret desires of my heart! Must not every Christian, then, say to himself:

How could I dare to transgress a divine command under the very eyes of the Most High! How could I dare to rebel against my God, and thus insultingly outrage the Divine Majesty! No; for my life and for the life of my soul, I shall not do such a thing!

Hence you see, beloved brethren, what a powerful protection against sin lies in this lively faith in the presence of God, and how true it therefore is, that one cannot easily fall into sin as long as he keeps the divine presence before his mind.

b. But it is no less true that, as soon as a man loses sight of the divine presence, *he may easily* yield to temptation and *fall*. What may have been the cause why those two men, of whom the Scripture tells us, notwithstanding their age, their high position, and authority, fell so low as to lay their impious snares for the chaste Susanna? It was no other than that they deliberately turned away their eyes from God. For the prophet Daniel says expressly: "They perverted their own mind, and turned away their eyes, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments" (Dan. xiii. 9). Thus the sinner generally shuts his eyes to the presence of God. Therefore the Wise Man says: "On all thy ways think on Him [God], and He will direct thy steps "(Prov. iii. 6). On the other hand, he who does not think of God will not be guided by Him, but abandoned to his own perverse sense. Thus God Himself assures us, when He says, by the mouth of the Psalmist: "My people heard not My voice, and Israel hearkened not to Me. So I let them go according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions" (Ps. lxxx. 12, 13).

And does not *experience* confirm this statement? Is this not the true cause why vice is so common among Christians? For, whence comes it that so

many Christians, unblushingly indulge sinful thoughts and desires, carry on immodest conversations, are wanton in their deportment and behavior? Whence comes it, again, that so many cherish hatred and enmity towards their neighbors, and refuse all assistance to the poor? Whence comes it, that the duties of their state are neglected by so many, that there is so much injustice and dishonesty in business among Christians? Believe me, the reason is no other than this: that such Christians are not mindful of the awful presence of God. They try to hide their vices from the eyes of man; but the all-seeing eye of God, as if it were closed in continual sleep, they fear not. They are in the same condition as were the Israelites, when the prophet Ezechiel reproached them, saying: "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Juda is exceeding great . . . for they have said: the Lord hath forsaken the earth; and the Lord seeth not." The constant remembrance of the presence of God, therefore, affords us a protection, as necessary as it is powerful, against sin; and consequently it restrains us from evil. That is the first advantage which it affords.

2. The second advantage is of no less importance: the thought of the presence of God is a powerful incentive to good—to the *practice of virtue*. This truth is likewise clearly intimated to us by Holy Scripture, when it sums up the sanctity of the holiest men in the words, "They walked before God." With these words Holy Writ manifestly signifies that the walking before God, or in the presence of God, is always connected with a life of uncommon virtue and godliness.

And thus it is in reality. For in the thought of the presence of God we find the strongest motives for the fervent practice of virtue. I stand before God; God sees and observes me! What an incentive to speak

and act so as to deserve His approval! How does the servant, the soldier, the subject, act, who is under the eyes of his master, his general, his sovereign? What care does he not take to merit the commendation of his superior! Were it not a shame for a Christian, if the all-seeing eye of God had less influence upon him, than the eye of a superior has upon his subject?

I stand in the presence of God! What a powerful motive to perform my daily duties with the greatest possible perfection! If Almighty God is looking on, must I not say my daily prayers with the greatest recollection and the profoundest reverence? Must I not, then, try to fulfil the duties of my state in life faithfully and conscientiously; must I not maintain Christian discipline and order in my household, provide for the Christian education of my children? I stand in the presence of God! What a powerful motive to deny myself, to seek the will and pleasure of God in all things! What a powerful motive to receive all visitations and trials with unfaltering resignation from His hands, and to abandon myself entirely to His holy will!

That is all very true, you may say, but it is no easy matter always to walk in the presence of God, particularly for those who, like us, have to live in the midst of the distractions of the world. To disabuse you of this error, which is no less pernicious than false, I shall, in the third place, briefly show you the facility of this practice.

III. FACILITY.

For Christians who have not only a lively faith, but also some good will and fervor, it is, in fact, an easy matter always to walk in the presence of God. *No*

great effort is needed. That no bodily exertion is necessary, is evident. But neither does it need any particular mental strain. Such effort might be required, if we had to recall to mind each time the arguments for the omnipresence of God. But that is by no means necessary for the Christian faithful, such as we all are. For us it is sufficient to make an act of faith in the presence of God. It were also a toilsome task for us to try to represent God to ourselves as present under a certain visible form. But this is neither necessary nor advisable; it is enough to recall the presence of God, and to salute Him with some short but pious aspiration.

Extraordinary effort is not necessary. No, beloved brethren; in order to walk in the presence of God, follow *the lesson of the Apostle*, who says: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all things for the glory of God" (I. Cor. x. 31). Whatever you do, endeavor often to raise your hearts to God, renewing from time to time the intention of doing all things for His honor and for love of Him. This you should do particularly on beginning the day, and at the commencement of every *important action.* This is the best and, at the same time, the easiest way, always to walk in the presence of God. It is the best, because it is the practical exercise of the love of God, and love is the noblest and highest of motives; it is the easiest, because the heart is naturally disposed to love, and therefore love costs no effort.

Let us, therefore, beloved brethren, in future endeavor thus to walk in the presence of God; let us try, in all we do, to have the honor of God in view. Thus you will make the test for yourselves that the memory of the presence of God is the surest protection against sin, and the most powerful incentive to

virtue. You will at the same time experience that this holy practice is the beginning and foretaste of that everlasting bliss for which we all hope, and which consists in the presence of God, not hidden from our view as in this life, but revealed to us face to face, for evermore. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

DELAY OF CONVERSION.

"Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths."—Luke iii. 4.

WITH these words the Church again exhorts us to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Saviour. It is plain that this preparation should consist, above all, in the earnest endeavor to remove from our hearts everything that might displease the Divine Infant, particularly sin, which is, most of all, displeasing to Him. Hence it follows, that, leaving aside utter impenitence and obstinacy in sin, nothing is more opposed to this desired preparation than the *delay of conversion* and perseverance in the state of sin. As this is a common device by which Satan has deceived many and brought them to eternal ruin, I consider it of the highest importance, on this occasion, earnestly to warn you against the deceit of the enemy. I shall, therefore, endeavor to show you that to defer one's conversion to God is as unjust as it is fool-hardy and dangerous, while I characterize—1. the *injustice;* 2. the *folly;* 3. the *danger* of the behavior of the unrepenting sinner.

1. INJUSTICE.

The delay of conversion is a crying injustice, both against God and against one's own soul.

1. It is an injustice *against God*, an injustice in the strictest sense, that is to say, against God's supreme

dominion. For God, our Creator, who preserves us continually by His almighty hand, and thus, as it were, creates us anew at every moment, is our sovereign Lord. Our whole lives, therefore, and every instant of our lives, by supreme right belong to Him. If, then, we dispose of our lives, or a part of them, otherwise than in His service, we evidently violate His right of dominion. Now, it is manifest that man does not serve God as long as he defers his conversion and continues to live in the state of sin and enmity with God. The delay of conversion is, consequently, a violation of God's sovereign dominion, an injustice in the strictest sense, a real fraud practised against God.

But what makes this injustice the more outrageous is the fact that the time which is unjustly taken from God is devoted to the *service of Satan*. This, beloved brethren, is an incontrovertible fact. The whole world is divided into two great armaments, arrayed against each other. On the one side are drawn up the forces of the good, under the banner of Jesus Christ, on the other, the forces of the wicked, under the standard of Lucifer. A single glance at the state of the world is sufficient to convince us of the dread reality of this warfare. And every man must take part in the combat. There is no room for neutrality, for Christ says expressly: "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. xii. 30). But the sinner, as long as he defers his conversion, is not with Christ. Therefore he is against Christ, and fights the while under the banner of Satan. What else, then, is it to delay one's conversion than to defraud God of the time allotted for His service, and to devote it to the service of the evil one?

And what is this time which is given to the service of the devil? It is the only time of which we can dispose. For the past, which no longer exists, and the

future, which has not yet come into existence, and perhaps, for us at least, never will, are not at our disposal. He who delays his conversion, therefore, gives to the devil the only time he possesses, and promises God that time which he may *never possess.* That is as much as to pay the devil in ready cash, and put off Almighty God with vain promises.

But, suppose the sinner could count on the future? What time does he set apart for the service of God? The *most worthless of life*, decrepit old age. Is that not an outrage against Almighty God? Suppose a servant worked the livelong day in the service of others, and only gave the late evening hours to the service of his master, how insulting would not such conduct appear to his master? Is it less offensive to God, our sovereign Master, if His servant gives the morning of youth and noon-tide of manhood or womanhood to the service of Satan, and reserves for God only the declining evening of life, when soul and body are worn out in the slavery of sin? Will a subject set before his sovereign the offal of his table? What an insult! He who defers his conversion offers a still greater insult to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Or can there be anything more revolting than to offer to God a soul and body which, for many years, have been the tenement of Satan and the haunts of his intrigues? How, my dear friend? You will serve God when the world no longer cares for you? God must rest satisfied with whatever the devil and your passions have left of you! And with such outrageous conduct you flatter yourself that you will save your soul and gain everlasting life.

2. The delay of penance is also an injustice to *your own soul.* To give the body the preference over the soul, to deny the soul what is readily granted to the

body, is an unjust treatment of the soul. O sinner, who defer your conversion, your soul is *sick*. It is shaking under the fever of passion, and writhing under the torture of remorse! And you leave it in that state and do nothing to relieve its sufferings. Do you treat your body thus, when it is laid low with sickness? Your soul is covered with *wounds*. Every sin has inflicted a wound upon it. And you look on unconcerned, while it, as it were, bleeds to death, and you apply no remedy. Do you thus treat your body, if it receives a wound? Your soul is spiritually *dead*. Sin takes away the true supernatural life of the soul. You can, if you will, restore it to life. And you allow it, as it were, to putrefy in the corruption of iniquity. Would you thus act towards your dead body, if you had the power to resuscitate it?

The sinner, therefore, who defers his conversion denies to the soul what he willingly concedes to the body, and defrauds God of the most valuable portion of his life, to devote it to the service of Satan. Is that not a crying wrong done to God and his own soul? But I said that such behavior is also, in the second place, the greatest madness.

II. FOLLY.

1. If you hear that one has *failed in business*, beloved brethren, you do not at once say that he is a fool; for such misfortune may happen to the wisest and most prudent man. But what would you think of a man who, seeing the impending failure, and having all the facilities to redress the state of his affairs, neglects the most favorable opportunities, saying to himself that there is still time, and that other similar chances will turn up? Would you not think he was a downright fool? How can he know that such an occasion

will again present itself? Is it not sheer madness to sacrifice what is certain for what is uncertain? And though he might count on a favorable moment in the future, does he not bring an irreparable loss upon himself? Could he not at least give out the money thus obtained at interest, or otherwise profitably invest it? So you would doubtless judge him; and justly so. But does not the sinner who delays his conversion act just as foolishly, and much more so? Has he not failed in the most momentous business? Has he not lost all his supernatural possessions and all his profits? And does not the holy season of Advent offer him the most favorable opportunity to settle his accounts with Almighty God? And now he will let this occasion pass, because he thinks a similar one will present itself later on! Is that not altogether uncertain? And even though it were certain, does he not incur a loss that can never be repaired? He loses all the merits which he would in the meantime gain, if he were in the state of grace.

2. But what renders this delay a still greater folly is the fact that it makes conversion *more and more difficult*. For it is the greatest madness to defer any necessary business, when it is manifest that by every delay the difficulty increases. Now, the conversion of the sinner is an absolutely necessary business; for without conversion there is no salvation for him. And every delay renders it more and more difficult. Why?

a. Because the longer he delays his conversion, the more he comes under the *power of the devil*. Sin is the fetters by which Satan binds the sinner. Every new sin adds a new chain to those fetters. If it is even now hard to burst the bonds of Satan; how will it be, when you add to your present sins new ones, and thus deliver yourself up to the enemy, fettered in every limb?

b. Because by delay the *morbid state* of the soul becomes worse from day to day. For sin is not only the fetters of the soul, it is also a poison, which affects the very source of the soul's vitality. It obscures the understanding, weakens the will, pollutes the imagination, strengthens and inflames the lusts of the flesh. If it is now difficult to heal the malady of your soul, how will it be, when the poison has not only entered the faculties of the soul, but has forced its way to the senses and members of the body?

c. Finally, because by protracted delay the *grace* and assistance of God becomes always more limited. Nothing lessens the measure of grace so much as the abuse and neglect of the graces offered. But the delay of conversion is a flagrant abuse of God's grace. Almighty God stands at the door of your heart, and knocks, and says to you: "My child, open to Me the door of thy heart!" And how do you answer His call? You let Him wait until it please you to open. But for the devil, in the meantime, the door stands wide open! Is that not a terrible abuse of divine grace? Must not such conduct move God to withdraw His graces from you? Do you not see, then, to evidence, that by delay you render your conversion to God more difficult from day to day, and thus commit an act of the greatest folly?

Let us consider further the dangers which the delay of conversion entails.

III. DANGER.

The sinner who delays his conversion exposes himself to the imminent danger of eternal damnation.

1. Because he may at any time *die a sudden death.* Does not our blessed Lord tell us that the Son of Man shall come when we least expect Him: that He

shall come like a thief in the night (Matt. xxiv. 50 and 43)? Is a sudden death a thing of rare occurrence? Do we not daily hear and read of sudden deaths? Who has given the impenitent sinner a security that he will not die suddenly? Has he not more reason than others have to fear an unexpected death? A sudden death is often the natural consequence of those vices to which the impenitent sinner is commonly addicted. And is it not often a chastisement which Almighty God inflicts upon the sinner who presumes upon His mercy? If the Lord orders the tree that bears no fruit to be cut down and cast into the fire, how shall He deal with that which bears poisonous fruits—fruits of impurity, fruits of intemperance, fruits of avarice, fruits of pride and immoderate ambition?

However great the patience of God may be with the sinner, it is certain that the measure of sin which He will endure from His creature has its limits, and that God's justice will finally put an end to the sinner's wicked career. Now, it is evident that every mortal sin brings him nearer to the fulness of this measure of iniquity. Every mortal sin, consequently, brings the sinner a step nearer to the abyss of hell. O reckless sinner, for years, perhaps, you have been walking upon this path! Perhaps at this moment you stand on the brink of the precipice! One step more, perhaps, one mortal sin more, will thrust you into the abyss of everlasting despair! Is it not the height of rashness, then, to defer your conversion even for an hour?

2. But let us suppose more favorable circumstances, that the sinner dies not a sudden death, but in consequence of a protracted illness. Will he be converted, as he hopes, in this last illness? That such a conversion is not impossible is certain; for as long as a man lives, he may still return to God. But the question is

not whether he can be converted while he lives, but whether he shall live so long as to be converted. Will he live to see his conversion? That is the question. And I answer, it is possible, but very doubtful. For—

a. Death may *surprise* the sinner even on his *bed of sickness.* This is confirmed by the warning words of Our Lord, as well as by experience. People generally die at an hour when they least expect it. How easily may it happen that a man who has always put off his conversion may, as is his custom, say: "Oh, to-morrow I shall make my confession"—and for him there is no morrow!

b. Besides, there is no more unfavorable time for conversion than the last moments before death. For they are usually too *short* for the sinner to settle the account of his conscience, which has been for years in disorder. It is, moreover, a time when the sinner, both on account of his sickness and the impending separation, is too much *pre-occupied*, seriously to turn his attention to the business of his salvation; particularly if, at the same time, he has to dispose of his temporal affairs. Finally, it is a time of violent *temptation.* For if the devil so violently attacks us in life, when spiritual defeat can be so easily repaired, what efforts will he not make in the last struggle, on which depends his ultimate victory. Will he not employ all his force and guile to obtain the final triumph? Will he not, above all, bring all the sins of his life, in all their hideousness and enormity, before the mind of the sinner, in order to plunge him into the abyss of despair? And how often does he not succeed in this device? Is that not one of the chief reasons why many in their last moments refuse the assistance of the priest? And this time, so short, so full of sufferings and temptations, is the time on which the impenitent sinner counts!

The delay of conversion to God is, therefore, as hazardous as it is unjust and fool-hardy. It is, in fact, the sad sign of future reprobation. My dear brethren, the symptoms of approaching death, the signs of impending temporal calamities, fill you with horror. Has this mark of eternal reprobation no terror for you? You have the curse of Cain marked upon your brow, and you tremble not? Now you can easily efface this mark; by one good confession you can change the sign of damnation into the sign of salvation. Why, then, do you hesitate? For years, perhaps, you have been sleeping on the verge of the eternal precipice. Awake, my friend; the hour of mercy is now at hand. Take a generous resolve; make a good confession, and eternal bliss will be your portion. Amen.

Sunday after the Nativity.

THE INCARNATION.

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son made of a woman, made under the law."—Gal. iv. 4.

THE epistle of to-day, beloved brethren, from which I have taken my text, is calculated to call forth our love and gratitude towards Our Lord Jesus Christ. It recalls to our mind the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, in which He for our sake has so humbled Himself, that by His humiliation we might be exalted. This self-abasement of the Son of God and our consequent exaltation in the mystery of the Lord's Incarnation will be the subject of my discourse. It will, therefore, be my object to show you from the epistle of the day that the Incarnation of the Son of God is a mystery—

1. Of the *profoundest humiliation of God*
2. Of the *highest exaltation of man.*

I. HUMILIATION OF GOD.

1. That the Incarnation is a mystery of the profoundest self-abasement on the part of God follows evidently from the words of the epistle, "But when the fulness of the time was come, *God sent His Son*, made of a woman, made under the law." If a prince of royal blood received from his father the command to live among, and converse only with the lowest and most degraded of his subjects, to pass his life in obscurity, unknown and unhonored, would that not be a great humiliation?

Such a mission was given to a royal prince, not to the son of an earthly ruler, but to the Son of God, the Son of the King of kings. For, according to the words of the Apostle just quoted, God, the Father, sent His only-begotten Son into the world—Him, who is equal to the Father, true God, Supreme, Almighty, and Eternal; whom the Cherubim and Seraphim adore in profoundest humility.

And for whom did He send His only-begotten Son? For us sinners, slaves of Satan, who had fallen under the curse of eternal damnation. And for such contemptible and worthless creatures, for the lowest and most degraded of His subjects, God gave up His Son, though this mission wholly obscured in Him the splendor and glory of the Father. For was He not, and is He not still, hidden from the world—in Bethlehem, where He was born; in Egypt, where He fled; in Nazareth, where He lived; in Jerusalem, where He died; in many countries, where for centuries He was and still is persecuted by His own? And is He not even concealed from the eyes and hearts of many Christians, who, notwithstanding His love, turn away from Him? Is it not true, then, that this mission of the Son of God was most humiliating for Him?

2. But what makes this mission appear still more humiliating is the manner in which it was executed, and which is expressed by the Apostle in the words, "*made of a woman.*" God, therefore, sent His Son as the Son of man. What a self-abasement! The Son of God, the Creator of all things, becomes in His humanity a creature, that is, the Infinite becomes finite; the Eternal becomes mortal; the Immense, whom the universe cannot contain, is circumscribed by the limits of time and place. He becomes man

like us, and is, like us, exposed to heat and cold, to hunger and thirst, to suffering and death; in a word, He is subjected to all our wants and weaknesses, sin alone and the law of sin excepted.

The Father sent Him born of a woman. The Almighty God, who holds the universe in His hand, from whom all power and life emanates, becomes a little infant babe, who cannot help Himself, but is totally dependent on others for His life and sustenance. How weak and helpless is a new-born child! How totally dependent on his mother! Mothers, call to mind the condition of your little children after their birth; how they lay there in utter helplessness, unable to use a limb, crying for help, and claiming your care day and night. In this piteous and helpless state the Son of God appeared amongst us—the Almighty God a helpless babe! Behold Him wrapt in poor and scanty swaddling clothes! His cradle a manger, and His couch a little coarse straw! The Sovereign Lord assumes the form of a slave, and the Almighty puts on the garb and the nature of a tiny infant.

But will His humiliation stop here? No, beloved brethren; our blessed Lord will condescend still farther. The Apostle adds: "*made under the law.*" He who is the supreme law-giver, the source of all law and right, subjected Himself to the law. He subjected Himself to the law of Moses, as we see from the circumcision, the presentation in the temple, and the sacrifice connected with that ceremony. Yet the Mosaic law was hard and humiliating for Him, as it was given for a rude and sensual people. Still, He submitted to the law, so that He could truly say of Himself: "I am not come to destroy but to fulfil the law" (Matt. v. 17).

And as He was obedient to the law, so He was

obedient to every wish of His holy Mother, Mary, and of His foster-father, St. Joseph. "*He was subject to them*" (Luke ii. 51), namely, to His parents, who were holy, it is true, but still only poor human beings of His creation. He allowed Himself to be ruled by them, and was in all things dependent on them. Nay, out of obedience to His foster-father He did not disdain to work at the laborious and humble trade of a lowly carpenter. He even submitted to the ordinances of heathen rulers. He paid the prescribed tax; He acknowledged the authority of Pilate and submitted in obedience to the scourging and the death of the cross. Yea, He submitted even to the caprices of the executioners and allowed Himself to be mocked, and buffeted, and spit upon, and trodden under foot, and outraged by them, according to their pleasure and passion. The profoundest submission in all things, from the first to the last moment of His life! "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8).

Is not, therefore, the Incarnation of the Son of God in truth a mystery of the profoundest humiliation of God? Now, if the Son of God has submitted Himself to this humiliation for our sake; if by this self-abasement He has, moreover, wonderfully raised and exalted us; have we not in this mystery a powerful motive to love Him with our whole heart, and show our gratitude to Him by a truly Christian life? And this is in reality the case, as we shall now consider.

II. THE EXALTATION OF MAN.

By the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, we have been, in fact, wonderfully elevated.

1. First of all, from being slaves we have been made

freedmen. The Son of God, by becoming man, has freed us from a threefold slavery.

a. From the *slavery of the Old Law.* The Old Law, as the Apostle repeatedly teaches, was the law of fear; a law, as it were, made for slaves, both on account of the many external observances which it prescribed, and on account of the terrible punishments inflicted for its transgression; while the eternal reward offered for its faithful observance was placed in the background. By the divine Incarnation we have been freed from this slavery. This truth is laid down by the Apostle, in the epistle of to-day, in the words: "God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem those who were under the law;" that is, that He might free them from the slavery of the law. By this mystery the Old Law was abolished, and the New Law, the law of love, the law of grace, the sweet law of Christ, established in its place. By the Incarnation we have been

b. Freed from the *slavery of idolatry*, that degrading vice which held our fore-fathers captive. This idolatry, beloved brethren, or the worship of idols, was in reality nothing else than the worship of the devil, the service of Satan. It was demons, say the Holy Fathers, that were worshipped and adored in the idols, or images of the gods, to whom even human beings were sacrificed, and in whose honor, now the most rigorous austerities, now the most inhuman vices were practised. Such demon-worship could manifestly promise its votaries nothing but temporal and eternal misery. That it was the Incarnation of the divine Son which freed our ancestors from this degrading slavery of idolatry, needs no further proof. But by the same manifestation of divine love we have been freed from a third kind of slavery.

c. The *slavery of sin,* of our *lusts,* of *Satan.* For to whom do we owe the grace which cancels sin, which tames our unruly passions, and crushes the tyranny of Satan? To the Word made flesh, who dwelt amongst us. By this adorable mystery, therefore, we are, in the fullest and strictest sense of the word, made freedmen from being the most abject of slaves.

2. But our elevation through the divine Incarnation is still higher; for by it we are raised from being children of Satan to the dignity of the *children of God.* "He that committeth sin," says St. John, "is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning" (I. John iii. 8), that is to say, the sinner is the child of the devil, because the devil is the father of sin. But we were all sinners, and, therefore, at one time the children of the Evil One. And what are we now? We are by the grace of the Son of God made man, by the unspeakable love of our dear Saviour, children of God. For the Apostle says in express terms: "God sent His Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons." What an elevation of poor human nature! If a rich and noble man adopts the child of a slave, is the poor child not thereby honored and elevated? And if a great and powerful king adopts the child, I will not say of a subject, but of a criminal, is that not a still greater elevation? How great, then, is not our exaltation, since God Himself, the King of heaven and earth, the King of kings, has received us as His adopted children—us, who were the children of Satan, who is not only a criminal, but the father of crime, consigned to the abyss of hell for all eternity, as a deserved punishment for his wickedness! Can we imagine a greater elevation?

3. And yet we have obtained a still higher elevation through this inscrutable mystery. If the king of whom

we have just spoken should not only adopt the son of the aforesaid criminal, but also make him the heir to his crown, would he not by such a signal favor raise him to a much higher dignity? Now, beloved brethren, a similar, but an incomparably greater dignity has been conferred on us through the mystery of the Incarnation; for in this mystery God not only received us as His adopted children, but has also made us *heirs of God,* heirs of His heavenly kingdom, and joint-heirs with His only-begotten Son. "Therefore you are no longer servants," says the Apostle, "but sons." "And if sons," he adds, "also heirs through God." This, beloved brethren, is an unspeakable distinction; an elevation which makes us, poor miserable creatures, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, and thus raises us to the same level with Our Lord and Saviour; a favor which has cost the Son of God the sacrifice of His humiliation, and is, therefore, equal to this infinite sacrifice in worth; an honor which awakes the jealousy and fury of hell, so that it rallies all its forces to strip us of this dignity.

Acknowledge, then, the dignity to which your Redeemer has raised you, and beware of falling into your former degradation by an un-Christian life. Remember that you are children and heirs of the Most High; and forget not that the Son of God by His humiliation has freed you from the powers of darkness and brought you into the admirable light of His kingdom. This remembrance of the infinite mercy of your Saviour will fill your hearts with thankfulness, and induce you, as is meet, to give your whole hearts to Him and live for Him alone. And thus you will once enter upon your inheritance in His kingdom; an inheritance which neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor heart of man conceived! Amen.

Sunday after New Year.

DISCONTENT WITH DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

"Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel."—Matt. ii. 20.

In the life of the Holy Family, we justly admire the special care with which God watched over them, and directed them to the great end which, in His inscrutable wisdom, He had proposed for them. Thus He frustrated the murderous designs of Herod, by ordering the flight into Egypt, and again, after the death of Herod, He recalled them to their own country, the land of Israel.

With the same loving care He watches over each of us, and disposes all things so that they may contribute to our welfare; that all the actual incidents of our lives may turn out to our advantage, may direct and further us on the way to our last end, that is, to everlasting happiness. This paternal solicitude of God, which "reaches from end to end mightily, and orders all things sweetly," we call *Divine Providence*. From the very fact of this divine guidance it manifestly follows that we should accept all things as coming from the fatherly hand of God.

I have, therefore, determined to-day to impress upon your minds and hearts this fundamental truth of our holy religion. And, in order to do so, I shall make use of two motives, which, according to St. Augustine, are fitted to make a deep and lasting impression on us—viz., the motives of our binding *duty*

and our personal *interest*. From the first motive we shall perceive the *perverseness*, from the second, the *unhappiness* of him who refuses to submit with filial resignation to the ruling of Divine Providence.

I. PERVERSENESS.

He who refuses to submit to the loving guidance of Divine Providence makes himself guilty of a grievous crime in the eyes of God. For, the cause of his refusal is either that he does not believe in a Providence, or that, believing in it, he withholds his submission, and, as far as in him lies, sets himself against its ruling. In the first case he is guilty of *unbelief;* in the second, of *rebellion* against God; both of which are equally perverse and criminal in the eyes of God.

1. *Unbelief.* If, from infidelity, one refuses submission to the ruling of Divine Providence, one makes himself guilty of a sin against God and rational nature, by contradicting the evident teachings of his own reason. For, reason clearly tells him that there is a sovereign Ruler, who, with wonderful efficacy and harmony, disposes and controls the universe, and that this same supreme rule and guidance must necessarily extend to every portion and every individual of the universe. To deny this fact is, therefore, a most flagrant contradiction of reason; and, in a matter so grave, it is, evidently, a grievous crime in the eyes of God, who has given us our natural reason, not to contradict it, but to follow its teaching.

But this perverseness will appear the more criminal, if we further consider that he who denies the Providence of God denies the very existence of the true God and becomes practically an *atheist*, for whom there is no God. For the true God, who is all-wise and all-bountiful, cannot merely content Himself with

creating man for an end which is in keeping with His divine Majesty and man's own rational nature; He must, also, efficaciously aid him in the attainment of this end. He must, therefore, provide that nothing befall His rational creatures but what may be salutary to them and what may lead them infallibly to their last end, provided they submit with resignation and obedience to His dispositions. Is not this Providence, then, the necessary consequence of God's infinite wisdom and bounty?

Beloved brethren, what would you say of a father who showed no concern for his children, after they had been born into this world, but abandoned them to their fate? Would he, in your opinion, be a wise and benign parent? Would you not, on the contrary, consider him a monster of insensibility and cruelty? But God is our father, and would He not be guilty of even greater cruelty if, after creating us, His children, He left us to our own miserable lot? There is, therefore, but one choice left us; we must either believe in an all-ruling Providence and humbly submit to its guidance, or we must deny the existence of the true, *i.e.*, the all-wise and all-bountiful God, and thus make ourselves guilty of the most enormous impiety.

2. *Rebellion.* But it is no less criminal to refuse to submit to the ruling of Divine Providence, when the fault is not unbelief of the mind, but rebellion of the heart. For is it not the grossest outrage against the Divine wisdom and goodness, if one believes in a divine Providence which controls the whole universe, even in its smallest details, and yet declines to subject one's self to its guidance? Does this not mean positively to *resist* Almighty God? And do you think He will allow such contempt of His divine Majesty to go unpunished?

What makes the rebel against Divine Providence

still more guilty in the eyes of God is the *bad example* which he gives, and which is apt to lead many others into the like sins. He, therefore, bears his share of the responsibility for all the sins committed on account of his pernicious example. And who is not aware of the number of sins that originate from this revolt against Divine Providence? How different would the aspect of the world be; how many sins of anger, hatred, revenge, pride, jealousy, ingratitude to God and injustice to man, would be prevented; what contentment and happiness would reign in the world; if Christians lived conformably to their faith in Divine Providence, and received every adversity that came in their path, not as the mere working of adverse elements, nor as the machinations of their enemies, but as a loving correction from the hand of an all-wise and all-bountiful Providence? Whoever, therefore, refuses to submit to the guidance of Divine Providence, particularly if he is a man of any authority and influence, cannot fail to become the cause of many sins to others, and thus to heap grave guilt upon his own soul.

And to what rule will he submit, who has shaken off the yoke of the divine guidance? Evidently, he must submit to some rule, as he cannot exempt himself from all duty, and must, therefore, adopt some norm, by which he may ultimately decide what this duty is. He must, therefore, abandon himself to the guidance of *fate*, or of *human prudence*. This is the only alternative. If he choose the former, he must attribute every event of his life, every occurrence in the universe, to mere chance. This is nothing else than to make fate actually the ruler of the world. And is this not *idolatry* in its genuine form, no less condemnable than that of the ancient pagans, who set up idols and temples to all-ruling fate?

But if he choose the latter, and make human prudence his guide, he must in all his actions decide of himself what is in accordance with human prudence, and what is not; in other words, he must make his own prudence his supreme rule. But is this not the most intolerable *pride*, a deification of his own reason? For thus, in his self-sufficiency, he consults his own reason only, trusts in it alone, makes it his supreme rule and his sovereign judge in all his deliberations and actions. It follows, then, that, however he may choose the guide of his actions, he offers a most outrageous insult to God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe, and the Provident Father of the whole human family and of its every individual member.

It is, therefore, no slight offence, but a gross outrage against Almighty God, to try to exempt one's self in any way, whether by unbelief or by rebellion, from the guidance of God's all-ruling Providence. Should not this consideration alone inspire us with horror against such criminal behavior towards our Supreme Lord and Ruler? Should it not induce us to submit ourselves with resignation, and to receive with submission, as from the hand of a loving father, whatever God is pleased to send us? But we must, moreover, consider that he who would exempt himself from the ruling of Divine Providence makes himself utterly unhappy.

II. UNHAPPINESS.

1. The first cause of unhappiness in him who refuses to be guided by Divine Providence is the *lack of all reliable guidance*, which must necessarily produce a constant uneasiness. For, having renounced the guidance of Divine Providence, he must either direct himself, or abandon himself to the direction of another. But in neither case can he find a safe guidance and true hap-

piness. For, in the first case, if he directs himself, he follows his own judgment and violates one of the first principles of human prudence, viz., that we should not rely on our own judgment in our own affairs, especially in matters of moment. The reason is, because, such are our various inclinations and passions, self-love blinds our understanding and does not allow us to come to a just decision in our own cause. Hence the correctness of such decisions is always, to say the least, doubtful, and the decisions themselves and the rule on which they are formed are unreliable and unsafe. The consequence is that the man who forsakes the direction of Providence, and relies upon his own resources will, unless his judgment is very limited or very perverse, be in a state of constant insecurity, uneasiness, and utter unhappiness.

But he will fare no better, if he entrusts himself to the *guidance of another*. For those to whose direction he will confide himself will commonly be his own friends, people like himself, of the same worldly and selfish principles and sentiments; for it is not likely that one who has impiously revolted against the Providence of God will seek the guidance of truly wise and pious Christians. But such direction is just as unsafe as his own, for those advisers are ruled by the same passions and evil inclinations as he himself. It is the blind leading the blind. Therefore the prophet Jeremias warns us against such guides, when he says: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm" (Jer. xvii. 5). The man who abandons the guidance of Divine Providence, therefore, finds a very unsafe substitute, either in himself or his congenial fellowmen, and his lot can only be one of doubt, anxiety, and unhappiness.

2. Another cause of unhappiness to him who has

renounced the guidance of Divine Providence is, that, as he abandons God, so *God will abandon him.* He refuses to grasp the loving hand which God extends to him for his safety and protection. What, then, is more natural than that God should withdraw His all-powerful and all-protecting arm from him, and leave him to his own helplessness? True, Almighty God is always ready to give him that assistance which is absolutely necessary for his salvation; yet He will no longer bestow upon him that fatherly care, which is wont to ward off many temporal evils from man, and to put his salvation within easy reach. Rather He will permit temporal calamities to come upon him, that he may enter into himself, see the wretchedness of his state, and return to Him by a true conversion. But if, notwithstanding this fatherly correction, he continues on his evil ways, he will surely fall into many sins, that will weigh heavily upon his conscience and bring him to the brink of everlasting despair. And if, as often happens, misfortune after misfortune come upon him, and he find himself breadless and penniless some day, whither shall he betake himself? Where shall he find relief? With his former friends, who are bent only on gain, perhaps at his loss? For wise reasons of their own they will keep aloof from him. With Almighty God? From Him he need expect no other answer than that which He once gave to His faithless people: "Where are their gods, in whom they trusted; of whose victims they ate the fat, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings; let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress" (Deut. xxxii. 37, 38.)

3. To crown his wretchedness, he who refuses to submit to the ruling of Divine Providence *lacks all comfort* in affliction, as long as he perseveres in his impious disposition. For, in the first place, it is evident that he

has no consolation to expect from God, since God cannot, by showing him such favor, encourage him in his career of revolt against His Providence. Can he enjoy the peace and consolation of a good conscience? His conscience can only torture him with fretting remorse, and bitter reproaches, and menacing threats. Can he find comfort from any other source? For him there is no comfort, as long as he bears the cause of his affliction within him, as long as he continues to foster within him the rebellion against the Providence of God. For this is the cause of his misfortune; and, as long as the cause continues to exist, the effect will remain. And this is the reason, beloved brethren, why so many come to utter wretchedness and despair in this life, and eternal perdition hereafter. They bring on their own misery by their revolt against God's loving Providence; they seek relief where it is not to be found, in drink, and dissipation, and debauchery; at last, they abandon themselves to despair, in many cases, take away their own lives, and, when it is too late, awake to their error in the flames of hell.

Let us, then, beloved brethren, beware of this error, so offensive to Almighty God and so disastrous to ourselves. Let us, at this instant, make the firm resolve in future to abandon ourselves wholly to the sweet dispositions of Divine Providence, and to accept adversity as well as prosperity with resignation from God's fatherly hand, assured that He, in His wisdom and goodness, will allow nothing to befall us, but what will be for our true welfare in this life, or the life to come. Then we may confidently say with the Psalmist: "The Lord ruleth me, and I shall want nothing" (Ps. xxii. 1). Amen.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN.

"He was subject to them."—Luke ii. 51.

WITH these words St. Luke wishes to signify that the Divine Child, Jesus, in His behavior towards His parents, was a model son. "He was subject to them," that is, He conscientiously fulfilled all His duties towards His parents. God, who inspired the sacred writer to pen these words, had evidently the intention to set up the child Jesus as the ideal and pattern of all children, and thus to stimulate them to the faithful fulfilment of their duties towards their parents. For the same end I shall to-day take for my subject the *duties of children*. And in order to give the matter the fullest possible treatment within the short time at my disposal, I shall briefly explain to you—

1. The *extent;* 2. the *importance;* 3. the *fulfilment* of these duties. Thus my discourse will prove instructive not only for the children themselves, but also for the parents, as the latter may thence learn what they have the right and the duty to require from their children.

I. EXTENT.

All the duties of children towards their parents may be reduced to three principal heads: *Reverence, obedience*, and *love*, as may be seen from the wording of the fourth commandment of God: "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother." For only he honors father and mother, who reveres, obeys, and loves them.

Why does Almighty God impose this duty upon children? It is because of the high place which the parents occupy in regard to their children. Almighty God has invested them with His own dignity, power, and love, and thus has constituted them His representatives in behalf of their children.

1. They are invested with the *dignity* of God; for they represent, in regard to their children, God as the Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer—as the Creator, because Almighty God has availed Himself of the instrumentality of the parents for the creation of the children, so that to their parents, next to God, the Creator, they owe their existence; as the Preserver, because, in His sweet providence, He has imposed upon the parents the duty, in His own place, to provide for the maintenance, health, bodily and spiritual development of their children; as the Redeemer, because by the provision of our parents we are made partakers of the grace of baptism, of faith, in a word, of all the saving graces of the Redemption. God has, therefore, clothed parents, as His representatives in regard to their children, with this threefold dignity of co-operating with Him in their creation, preservation, and redemption; a dignity, which demands *reverence* on the part of the children. And this reverence constitutes the first of the duties of children towards their parents.

2. Parents in regard to their children are invested with the *power* of God. God is our supreme ruler and law-giver. As such He has given us His commandments either directly, from His own lips, as on Mount Sinai, and through Jesus Christ, His Son; or indirectly, through His Church. Now, parents have received the charge from God to see that their children keep the commandments. For this office, then, they must have received the necessary power and authority from God.

In fact, parental authority is the first and oldest of all powers conferred by God on His creatures. In the beginning there was no other authority than that of parents, which comprised in itself all powers, spiritual and temporal. Therefore the first rulers were called patriarchs, *i. e.*, father-rulers. This rule is also the mildest and gentlest, because it is moderated by that parental love which God has infused into the heart of every father and mother. Hence it follows that God has also clothed parents with His own divine authority, which children are bound to obey. The second duty of children towards their parents is, therefore, *obedience*.

3. Parents are invested with the *love* of God in behalf of their children. For, as Almighty God is concerned for the welfare of the children, which by His providence altogether depends on the fidelity of parents in the fulfilment of their duties, He has infused into their hearts a spark of that infinite love, which He Himself bears to their children, to make those duties not only easy, but also sweet for them. There is, in fact, no love which so nearly resembles the love of God as the love of parents towards their children. The love of God towards us is an intense love. God's heart is full of benevolence towards us. His love is active and disinterested. But on earth there is no love more intense, more active, more disinterested than the love of parents to their children. Nothing can extinguish the ardor of this love; neither bodily, nor mental, nor even moral defects of the children. Parents are, consequently, in the third place, invested with the love of God in regard to their children. And this love, which Almighty God has infused into the hearts of parents, demands corresponding *love* on the part of the children towards their parents.

How important these duties are for children, and how eager they should be conscientiously to fulfil them, is the second point which I propose to show you.

II. IMPORTANCE.

The duties of children towards their parents, beloved brethren, are of the greatest moment, because, as we have seen, the parents are the first and highest representatives of God in their regard. Therefore this commandment of God, "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother," follows in the Decalogue immediately after those which prescribe the duties which we owe to God Himself. It is the *first* of those commandments which treat of our duties towards our neighbors and ourselves; because of all others our parents stand in the closest relation to us.

Nay, the importance of these duties is so great that not only the eternal, but also the *temporal welfare* of children depends on their faithful fulfilment; for Almighty God adds as a motive for the observance of this commandment: "That thou mayest be long-lived upon the land which the Lord, thy God, will give thee." On the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of this commandment depends the blessing or the curse of the parents, which so often decides the future happiness or misery of the child. This blessing or curse of the parent, beloved brethren, is not an empty sound. No; it carries with it a very special and peculiar power and efficacy for good or for evil. Noe blessed his two good sons, Sem and Japheth; and behold, from the posterity of the one was taken the chosen people of God, from whom the Saviour of the world was to spring; from the descendants of the other arose those powerful heathen nations, which subsequently embraced Christianity. Noe, on the other hand, cursed

his wicked son Cham; and to this day his accursed offspring is wretchedly pining in the darkness and slavery of paganism. Like blighting fire falls the curse of a dying parent on the head of a godless child. The sighs and tears of parents over wayward sons and daughters are the furies which will infest the death-bed of those perverse and unnatural children. How peaceful, on the other hand, is the death of the dutiful child! What a consolation for him to be conscious of having fulfilled all his duties towards his parents! He can say to himself: I die with the blessing of my parents, whom I have loved and honored with my whole heart. God will be true to His promise and show His mercy to me.

Therefore, my dear children, fulfil your duties towards your parents faithfully, and their blessing, like a guardian spirit, will accompany you on all your ways. It will protect you in life, console you in death, and plead for you before the judgment-seat of God. But, to enable you the better to do this, I will now explain to you what those duties require of you, more in detail.

III. FULFILMENT.

1. In the first place, with regard to the duty of *reverence*, which is the root and foundation of all duties of children towards their parents, children must, above all, cherish in their hearts towards their parents a respect and esteem based on the teachings of faith, always bearing in mind the high position which God has given to their parents in their regard, and banishing from their hearts every thought that would tend to lower their parents in their estimation. This inward sentiment of esteem and reverence will then also manifest itself outwardly, and they will honor their parents, as the Holy Ghost directs (Ecclus. iii. 9), "in *work*, and *word*, and *all patience*."

a. In *work*, by showing their parents, both at home and in public, all signs of childlike reverence, and carefully avoiding everything that might savor of disrespect. Children who neglect to do this are, to say the least, not good and dutiful, but rough and ill-bred children. Much more reprehensible are those who, when once they have attained to wealth and influence, despise their parents, are ashamed of them, go out of their way, and shun their company. What, my dear child! Have you so high an opinion of yourself, and yet you are ashamed of your father or mother? Ashamed of your parents, whose blood courses in your veins, to whom you owe your very existence, and consequently whatever you possess? But what shall I say of those who have so divested themselves of every human sentiment, not to say Christian filial piety, as (I dare hardly utter the crime!) to raise their unhallowed hand against their own parent? These are monsters, not men, a curse to themselves, a scourge to their parents, an abomination before God and society! Oh how terrible will be the judgment of such unnatural children!

b. In *word*. Children should always address their parents with respect, speak of them with reverence, take their part, and defend them, as far as possible, against all insults. Therefore, when their parents rebuke them, they must not sulk, interrupt them, or give them back-answers. Much less may they scoff at them, or laugh at their failings. Least of all should Christian sons or daughters so far forget themselves and the reverence due to their parents, as, blinded by brutal rage, to curse the mother that bore them, or the father that provided for their childhood. "He who curseth his father and mother," says the Holy Ghost, "his lamp shall be put out in the midst of darkness" (Prov. xx. 20), that is, his curse shall fall upon

his own head, he shall make himself amenable to eternal damnation.

c. In all *patience.* Children should bear the faults and failings of their parents with patience and forbearance. Their parents have borne their weaknesses with much greater patience and forbearance. Hence the Wise Man says: "Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life; and if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy strength; for the relieving of the father shall not be forgotten" (Ecclus. iii. 14, 15). If you are educated, your father uneducated, despise him not! If you are rich, your father poor, despise him not! Nay, if you are thrifty, sober, well-behaved, and your father, perhaps, given to the contrary vices, even then despise him not! And if your parents, by their own fault, have even plunged you into poverty and misery, despise them not! Whatever your parents may be, they are yours, and therefore claim your reverence.

2. The second duty of children toward their parents is *obedience.* What must they do to fulfil this obligation? Three things.

a. They must *do* what their parents command, and *avoid* what they forbid. For the Apostle says: "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord" (Col. iii. 20). You must, therefore, my dear children, do whatever your parents tell you, and know that this is the will of God. There is but one exception, the case in which the parents should command what is sinful, in which case the child must respectfully refuse obedience; for, as St. Peter says in the Acts of the Apostles (v. 29), "We ought to obey God rather than men."

b. Children should in important matters, as in the

choice of a state in life, *ask the advice* of their parents, and seriously and respectfully weigh their objections; for God has given them their parents as their natural directors and advisers.

c. They should also *take in good part* their parents' advice and correction. All this the children must do, if they will fulfil the duty of obedience to their parents. For the rest, this obligation is so strict that those children who disobey their parents in important matters, for instance, those who, contrary to the express command of their parents, frequent dangerous places, keep dangerous company, absent themselves from divine service or religious instruction, or neglect to learn what is necessary for their condition in life, can hardly be excused from grievous sin.

3. As to the third duty of children towards their parents—their *love* to their parents—it must be like the love of their parents towards them—*affectionate* and *active*.

a. The child's love is *affectionate*, when his heart is filled with good will towards his parents, that is, when he wishes them all that is good, especially a long and happy life; when he loves to think of them, seeks no company more eagerly than theirs. Therefore children who feel everywhere at home except with their parents; children who look with a longing for the day that will separate them from their parents, or even for the day when their parents shall close their eyes in death; children who think only of their parents' property, but soon forget their parents themselves—such children have no love for their parents, and are not worthy of the name of children.

b. The child's love is *active*, when he shows it exteriorly in his actions; when he endeavors, by thrift and good behavior, to give joy to his parents; when he is

always ready to lend them a helping hand; when he supports them in poverty, assists them in infirmity and old age; when he, finally, conscientiously respects their last will, and diligently prays for their departed souls. On the other hand, children who by dissipation, late hours, dangerous company-keeping, gambling, drinking, and similar vices, make life a burden to their parents; children who, instead of supporting their parents, desert them, instead of assisting them, spend their earnings on amusements and vanity; children who abandon aged and helpless parents; children who try to reverse their last will, and are unwilling to do anything for their poor suffering souls—these are inhuman and unnatural children, who have no love for their parents and are unworthy to bear the name of children. And yet, how often do we meet such hard-hearted children nowadays! O my dear children, is this the thanks you owe to your parents for the many toils and troubles, for all the sufferings and sorrows which they have borne for your sake; for all the anxious and sleepless nights which they have passed for you; for the countless benefits which they have conferred upon you?

Acknowledge, then, in its fulness, the great love of your parents towards you, and be thankful for the care and providence with which they have watched over your temporal and eternal welfare. Oh, how happy are you, my dear children, who still have your good parents to watch over you and provide for you! How many poor orphans there are, who never experienced the love of a father or mother! No loving father's, no tender mother's heart throbs for them! Lonely and forlorn they stand and weep their tears upon their parents' grave! Oh, how they envy you for the inestimable happiness of still possessing your lov-

ing parents! Be thankful, then, to Almighty God for this great blessing, and show your thankfulness by honoring your parents as His representatives on earth; by revering, obeying, and loving them with your whole heart and soul. And begin by asking their pardon from your hearts, for all the grief that you have thus far caused them by the neglect of those duties. And you, my dear children, who no more behold the face of your once loving parents, remember always what you owe to them; forget not daily to send up your prayers to the throne of the Most High, for those who once so dearly loved you. Amen.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

MARRIAGE.

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the marriage."—John ii. 1, 2.

Our blessed Lord, as we see from the words of the Gospel, was invited to this marriage feast, and He accepted the invitation. The invitation, on the one hand, shows, that the bridegroom and bride were anxious to secure the blessing of God for their wedded state; the acceptance of Our Lord, on the other hand, shows no less clearly that He was ready to bestow that blessing upon them; consequently, that the parties had a real vocation for the married state and could justly claim God's blessing. Vocation and grace are, in fact, necessary for the married state. Of this necessity I wish to convince you in the present discourse. I shall, therefore, show you that the married state entails—

1. Many important and serious *duties;*
2. Great and serious *dangers.*

And under these heads you shall easily perceive that those duties cannot be fulfilled, nor these dangers overcome, without a vocation and without special graces, to be secured, not only by the worthy reception of the Sacrament of matrimony, but also by prayer and a pious, God-fearing life.

I. DUTIES.

I said that with the married state many and serious

duties are connected, which, without a vocation and the grace attached to such a vocation, secured by a true Christian life, cannot be fulfilled. Let us first ask ourselves what those duties are. For after we have reviewed them, and have seen how frequently they are neglected, it will become evident that they exceed the mere natural powers of man, and, consequently, require a special assistance of divine grace. Marriage, I mean Christian marriage—for I speak only of Christian marriage—is, according to the teaching of the Apostle (Eph. v. 23–33), a representation of the union of Christ and His Church; and from this one attribute follow all its duties. The union of Christ with His Church is *holy* and *indissoluble*, and has for its object to *people heaven* with saints.

1. Marriage, therefore, as the true representation of Christ and His Church, is a *holy* union. The contract of marriage, as faith teaches us, is a true Sacrament of the Church, and as such must be treated with reverence. It is, therefore, not allowed to enter this state with other than holy motives. It is not allowed to receive this sacrament otherwise than in the state of sanctifying grace. Nor is it lawful to use it otherwise than according to the design which Almighty God had in instituting it. These three obligations are self-evident, as following immediately from the sacramental character of matrimony.

Notwithstanding this evidence, however, these obligations, sad to say, are little regarded even by Christians. Many think themselves at liberty to look upon this holy sacrament in a different light from the other sacraments of the Church. They do not consider any preparation necessary for its worthy reception, and have no scruple to approach this holy sacrament and enter the wedded state, not only from worldly motives,

but also in the state of grievous sin. They look upon marriage, not as a sacrament of Christ's Church, but as a mere secular institution, a means of enriching themselves and establishing themselves permanently in life. Hence it often happens that the union is not based, as it should be, on mutual love and confidence, but on the unstable foundation of wealth. Need we wonder, then, that such marriages as are contracted from a mere business standpoint, without love and affection, are unhappy; and that the parties seek to compensate the lack of affection by unlawful means? Is it not, therefore, evidently necessary, according to the example of that pious couple of Galilee, to solicit the presence of our blessed Lord at the marriage celebration, and thus to secure His blessing and His grace?

2. Marriage is, like the union of Christ with His Church, an *indissoluble* union; and as such, again, it imposes other strict obligations. For the indissolubility of the contract necessarily requires that the bond of union is an inward one, of heart with heart—a bond of love. The parties, therefore, are strictly bound to foster mutual love; and this love must resemble that which Christ bears to His Church—a reverential love; a love without reserve, without interruption, without change, in short, a Christ-like love.

But is the love between Christian husband and wife always such? If so, whence come so much ill-feeling and disaffection? Whence so many brawls and quarrels? Whence so many divorces? Would those bickerings and heart-burnings be of so frequent occurrence, or, rather, let us ask, would they ever occur, if the love between husband and wife were such as Christ bears to His Church? But the reason why this love is lacking is no other than that the parties neglect to implore the grace of God, which is necessary for this love, and to

prepare themselves for the reception of this Sacrament by a worthy confession and Communion.

3. Marriage has a sublime and holy *object*, to people heaven with saints—in other words, the *Christian education* of the children with whom God is pleased to bless the union of man and wife. Without this the end intended by God cannot be obtained. Now, it is self-evident that parents are bound to provide for the bodily and temporal welfare of their children, that they should try to fit them for this world as well as for the next; and, since for this end temporal means are necessary, parents have a special duty honestly to procure them. Time, however, does not permit me to enter any further upon this duty; nor do I consider it necessary to do so, as it commonly receives sufficient attention on the part of parents.

The duty of Christian education, on the other hand, is often lamentably neglected—and, in the first place, *Christian instruction*. How many there are who neglect to send their children regularly to the Christian doctrine, and, instead of making up for the loss at home, are only concerned to impress upon them the principles of this world, particularly the value of money and high social position.

Much less are such unscrupulous parents concerned about the *Christian lives* of their children—to keep them to the practice of their religion; to teach them to pray, to subdue their passion; to see that they assist at Mass on Sundays and days of obligation, that they receive the Sacraments at stated times. And how do those parents watch over their children? Are they careful to keep them aloof from everything that may endanger their innocence—from bad companionship, dangerous associations and amusements, bad books and pictures? Do they know where their children

pass their time, what they are doing, or with whom they associate? How necessary, therefore, is the grace of God for parents, to enable them to bring up their children for God and for heaven! What pains should they, then, take to obtain this grace from God! And to secure the grace of God they should be the more anxious, as the married state is, moreover, connected with great dangers.

II. DANGERS.

The dangers of the married state, beloved brethren, arise from the difficulty of reconciling certain rights or liberties attaching to married life with certain other indispensable Christian obligations.

1. The married parties are obliged to combine that *freedom of intercourse*, which is lawful for married people, with *conjugal chastity*—an obligation which becomes a stumbling-block for many. There is, as you are aware, a special kind of chastity obligatory on those who live in the wedded state, no less binding than chastity, strictly so called, is binding on single persons. This chastity prescribes certain limits to married people, which they cannot transgress without sin. What renders those sins more enormous in the eyes of God is the sacred character of the Sacrament of matrimony, which is violated by such transgressions. On the other hand, there is, by the intention of God, a certain freedom of intercourse permitted to man and wife, which is interdicted to unmarried people—a freedom which they cannot renounce at pleasure, and without mutual consent. This freedom they are obliged to combine with conjugal chastity. In other words, they are bound to make a moderate use of this liberty, and not trangress the limits prescribed by the divine law.

Is not this conflict between freedom and duty connected with grave danger? In fact, total abstinence from carnal pleasures may be easier than moderation in their enjoyment. So, at least, St. Jerome thought; for, of the three degrees of chastity: virginity, widowhood, and conjugal chastity, he maintains that the third, though by far the most imperfect, is yet the most difficult to observe. And why? Because, he says, it is much easier to abstain altogether than to moderate the indulgence of sensual lust, which is the domestic enemy of man. Virginity, he says, obtains the victory, by abstinence, almost without a struggle; it knows no danger, because it flees the occasion. The same may be said to some extent of widowhood. But with conjugal chastity it is quite different. Between this virtue and impurity there is but one step; and this step leads to sin, and often to eternal damnation.

2. The second contrast, which married people are obliged to reconcile, is a cordial and unrestricted *attachment to each other* with an inviolable *fidelity to God*. They must combine the attachment to the creature with the attachment to God. The fulfilment of this duty again entails its peculiar dangers. On account of the indissolubility of the bond of matrimony, as we have seen, there must be such a union of heart with heart, that one party is ready for the sake of the other to abandon every convenience, to make every sacrifice, as long as conjugal love does not conflict with the love they owe to God. Therefore the woman, who is ready to gratify her husband in every reasonable demand, must at the same time have the courage resolutely to resist him, as soon as he requires of her what is sinful and displeasing to God, whether it be in word, or in action, by commission or omission.

Now, this is, by no means, an easy matter. The husband may be displeased, may break out into violent passion, may revenge what he unjustly considers an insult, or uncalled for interference. But does this not precisely show what I have been insisting on, that great difficulties and dangers are connected with the married state, which only the special grace of God can overcome? O beloved brethren, how many husbands and wives have suffered shipwreck on this shoal! How many have been drawn into mortal sin and thrust into eternal ruin by this immoderate attachment, which chooses to offend the Creator rather than to displease the creature!

3. Finally, married people have the obligation, on the one hand, by all lawful means carefully and successfully to *manage their temporal affairs*, and, on the other hand, studiously to *shun avarice*, which is the root of all evil. But owing to the depraved inclinations of our nature, how imminent is the danger, in this struggle for temporal possessions, to go too far, to avail ourselves of unlawful means, at least, to attach our hearts immoderately to the goods of this world? Hence we find among married people so many who are grasping, avaricious, dishonest, and oppressive. To avoid this danger, there is certainly great need of the assistance of divine grace. From whatever side, then, we view this holy Sacrament of matrimony, the necessity of a special divine grace for husband and wife is manifestly apparent.

Now, beloved brethren, let us apply what has been said, each to his own particular condition. And first, my dear young men and young women, before entering upon this state, so full of dangers and serious duties, consider well the important step you are about to take, upon which depends your temporal and eternal

weal. Do not take this step rashly and without due preparation. But, above all, I must here warn you against *mixed marriages*. For, if the difficulties and dangers in purely Catholic marriages are so great, how great must they not be in mixed marriages, in which the Catholic party finds no support under those heavy duties, no protection in those threatening dangers, but must bear the burden and fight the foe all alone, or against the opposition of the non-Catholic party? In such marriages the hearts are divided on the main point—on religion, which alone can afford protection and support. Besides, as a rule, on the non-Catholic side we can hardly expect that supernatural love, which is so necessary for a happy Christian marriage. For these and many other reasons, which I have not now time to recount, the Church detests mixed marriages and only reluctantly, under any circumstances, gives her consent to such unions.

But you, my dear friends, who already live in this state, should make it your first object to secure for yourselves the grace of God. This you shall do, if you make good use of the means of grace which God has given you: prayer, the holy sacrifice of Mass, the Sacraments of the Church. And if some of you have entered this state rashly and without a vocation, let them not, therefore, despond. Almighty God is infinitely merciful. If they are heartily sorry for their former rashness; if they do penance by bearing patiently the trials and difficulties of their state; if they now the more fervently endeavor to bring upon themselves the grace of God, the merciful God will not remember their former transgressions, but will bring them, like all who are of good will, to His everlasting glory. Amen.

Third Sunday after Epiphany.

THE FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION.

"Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof." — Matt. viii. 8.

THE words just cited were spoken by the centurion in the Gospel, when our blessed Lord declared His readiness to come to his house and heal his servant. The lively faith and profound humility with which they were pronounced pleased Our Saviour, so that He commended the centurion's faith and forthwith granted his petition. Such should be our disposition when we approach to receive our blessed Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament. Therefore the Church has ordained that the priest, before administering holy Communion, should recite those words of the centurion in the name of the communicant, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof." With this faith and humility we should always approach this holy Sacrament. But the least that is required of us as a necessary disposition for this adorable Sacrament is the state of grace, that our Communion may not be an unworthy and sacrilegious one. For the fruits of unworthy Communion are as pernicious as those of a worthy Communion are salutary.

In order that you may always endeavor to prepare yourselves worthily for this holy Sacrament, I shall to-day briefly propose to you—

1. *The malice and pernicious effects of unworthy Communion;*

2. *The salutary fruits of worthy Communion.*

I. UNWORTHY COMMUNION.

1. *Its malice.* That you may be able rightly to conceive the direful effects of unworthy Communion, I must first try to make you understand its malice; for it is because of its enormity that its effects are so baleful. I say, then, that unworthy Communion is *a most grievous and heinous crime.*

a. It is one of those sins which are called *sacrileges*, because it is a direct insult against the sacred person, against the real and adorable body of Jesus Christ. St. Paul says this expressly: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord" (I. Cor. xi. 27). What does this mean, if not that the unworthy communicant commits an outrage against the real body of Jesus Christ? Unworthy Communion, therefore, is a true sacrilege.

b. And what a sacrilege, beloved brethren! A sacrilege the most heinous; a sacrilege only to be compared with that committed by the Jews against the sacred person of Our Lord. Unworthy Communion is, as it were, the *renewal of Our Saviour's bitter passion.* For, how did His passion begin? Was it not that one of His disciples, whom He had chosen from millions, on whom He had lavished His favors, accosted Him and, under the guise of friendship, betrayed Him with a kiss? And the unworthy communicant—is he not a disciple of Christ? Has Our Lord not privileged him before millions? Has He not showered countless graces on him? And does not the unworthy communicant, in like manner, betray his Lord with a treacherous kiss, under the guise of piety?

Then they bound Our Saviour and thus deprived Him of His liberty. Does not the unworthy communicant in the same way, as far as in him lies, deprive

our blessed Lord of His freedom? Does he not force Him to enter into his heart? And what manner of abode is the heart of the sinner? Is it not the most squalid prison? Whithersoever the divine prisoner in this unworthy tenement turns His eyes, He sees nothing but squalor, and filth, and abomination: a blinded mind, a perverse will, a corrupt imagination, unbridled passions. Oh, what an unspeakable loathing must not our Divine Lord experience, while He is forced to enter into this filthy dungeon!

They next delivered Him into the hands of His enemies and exposed Him to their insults and ridicule. Does not the unworthy communicant deliver his Lord and Saviour to His most bitter enemy, to Satan, who rules in the heart of the sinner?

And they scourged Him and crowned Him with thorns. And the sacrilegious Christian—does he not likewise scourge his Lord and crown Him with thorns? Are not all his grievous sins so many scourges inflicted on the sacred and tender body of his Lord and Saviour? Are not the unruly passions that rage unrestrained in his heart a crown of thorns that presses upon the head of Christ, his Lord?

Lastly, they crucified Him. Not otherwise does the sacrilegious sinner treat the Son of God. Does he not crucify Him in his impious heart? Does he not annihilate the life-giving efficacy of Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament? If every sinner, according to the apostle St. Paul (Hebr. vi. 6), crucifies his Saviour in his heart, how much more is the unworthy communicant, who bears Jesus Christ bodily in his heart, guilty of this crying sacrilege of "crucifying to himself again the Son of God"?

c. Finally, where and when is this heinous crime perpetrated? In this *Sacrament of God's love*, at the

moment when God would lavish His choicest favors upon the soul. Is there a mystery in our holy religion in which God has manifested His love to us as He has done in this adorable Sacrament? Here He exhausts, as it were, His infinite wisdom and power, to lavish His love upon us. And in this Sacrament of unfathomable love, the sacrilegious communicant goes and betrays Him with Judas, thrusts Him into the hideous dungeon of his heart, gives Him into the hands of His arch-enemy, delivers Him up to the scoffs and insults of His adversaries, scourges Him, crowns Him with thorns, crucifies Him! O black ingratitude! O crime, that cries to heaven for vengeance! How baneful, then, must not be the effects of such a dreadful sacrilege!

2. *Effects.* I will not here speak of those temporal chastisements, such as bodily infirmity, temporal losses, sudden deaths, and similar calamities, which, according to the teaching of the Apostle (I. Cor. xi. 30), are not rarely inflicted by God in punishment for this impious crime. The effects produced upon the soul are contained in the words of the Apostle, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord" (Ibid. 29). By judgment is here meant eternal damnation. The Apostle, therefore, wishes to say that the sacrilegious communicant takes to himself, appropriates, assimilates, as it were, the eternal punishment; therefore, that he not only merits hell-fire, but receives, so to say, the pledge and anticipation of eternal punishment, and thus exposes himself to the *imminent peril of eternal ruin.*

a. "He eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." Why? Because he brings upon himself a dreadful spiritual *blindness*, which is a mark of reprobation.

For, as the sun enlightens the eye that is healthy, and blinds that which is diseased, so the Holy Eucharist, the sun of love and mercy, enlightens the just man, and blinds the sinner. Spiritual blindness is a disregard for our own true spiritual interest; and the greater the interest is which we disregard, the greater is our inward blindness. How great, then, is the blindness of the unworthy communicant? He betrays his Saviour, who is the source of all his happiness; he consigns Him to that prison, which is the haunt of the evil spirit; he heaps sacrilege upon sin, so that his last state is worse than the first, and his heart, from being the abode of one foul fiend, becomes the den of a legion of demons. His soul, therefore, becomes a very hell of horror and confusion. He surrenders all peace and rest, and, too often, alas! hope itself. This is the reward he reaps from his sacrilegious deed—the reward which Judas reaped from the betrayal of his Lord. Judas by his perfidy forfeited his dignity as apostle, his honor and good name with posterity, his eternal happiness itself. And what did he gain? thirty paltry pieces of silver—and unspeakable remorse, bitterness, and despair—mental blindness, which led him on from sin to sin, until he consummated his impious treason, and ended his impenitent course on the tree of malediction. Such also is the wages of the unworthy communicant—an utter blindness and confusion of spirit, a true image of the blindness of the damned.

b. "He eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." Why? Because he brings upon himself the curse of *obstinacy* in sin. It is a general experience that a remedy which does not relieve a patient aggravates his state. And thus it is with the Most Holy Sacrament. It is either a saving remedy or a killing poison. And how could it be otherwise? If the sinner freely

and deliberately, without the impulse of passion, despite the natural horror and repugnance which so horrid a crime inspires, heaps such guilt upon his soul, need we, then, wonder that God abandons him to the depraved desires of his heart, so that, like the arch-traitor, he becomes hardened in his sin? And what consideration can soften him whom the love of Jesus Christ, whom His very bodily presence cannot move! From what crime shall he recoil, who does not shrink from profaning the sacred body of Jesus Christ!

c. "He eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." Why? Because he exposes himself to the greatest risk of despair and *final impenitence*. He has abused all graces: all the light which God had given him, the warnings of his conscience, the admonitions of his confessor, the grace of the Sacrament of penance, the incomprehensible love and mercy of Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Sacrament of the altar, the adorable person of Jesus Christ, the source of all graces. What grace has he left unabused, if he trampled under foot the most sacred body and blood of his Redeemer? "If the man who maketh void the law of Moses," says the Apostle, "dieth without any mercy, how much more do you think he deserveth worse punishments, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath esteemed the blood of the testament unclean?" (Heb. x. 28, 29.) May he not justly dread the most terrible of all chastisements—to become hardened in his sins, and to die without penance? You all know that the greater the abuse of grace is, the more it withdraws itself from the sinner; therefore, since unworthy Communion is the most flagrant abuse of grace we can imagine, it follows that it is most difficult for the sacrilegious communicant to return to God, and that this godless crime naturally leads to final impenitence and eternal reprobation.

From all this you see, beloved brethren, with what horror we must shrink from the unworthy reception of holy Communion, and how carefully we must try to prepare ourselves by a good and worthy confession. But if there should be one amongst you who has not thus prepared himself, but has approached the Holy of Holies unworthily, what then? Is he irretrievably lost? Oh, no, my dear friend; for there is no sin so great that it exhausts the mercy of the good God. His mercy is infinitely greater than the sins of the whole world together. Even the traitor who betrayed the Son of God, if he had only cast one repentant glance at his divine Master, would, like the penitent Peter, have obtained full forgiveness of his ruthless crimes. Such a sinner has no cause to despair; but he has every reason forthwith to return to Almighty God, to make a sincere and contrite confession of his sins.

But you, my dear friends, who always prepare yourselves faithfully for the reception of this holy Sacrament, be not disturbed by what I have been obliged to say thus far; rather turn your whole attention to the rich fruits of worthy Communion, and, full of confidence, continue often to partake of this spiritual food of your souls; for, as the effects of unworthy Communion are baneful, the fruits of worthy Communion are most salutary.

II. WORTHY COMMUNION.

As the Blessed Eucharist which we receive in holy Communion, according to the words of Christ (John vi. 56), is the true *food* of the soul, it must have effects on the soul corresponding to those of material food upon the body.

1. The first effect of this divine food is the preservation and increase of the spiritual life, i.e., of *sanctifying*

grace. For, as common food preserves and increases the vitality of the body, so this spiritual food preserves and increases the supernatural vitality of the soul. Now, the supernatural vitality of the soul is sanctifying grace, which is the principle of this higher life, with its peculiar supernatural and God-like operations. Holy Communion, therefore, preserves and augments sanctifying grace; and this it does in the most efficacious manner. For, if common food is the more strength-giving, the more nutriment it contains, what must be the power and efficacy of this food of the soul, in which Jesus Christ Himself, the fountain of all holiness, is contained!

2. The second effect of holy Communion is that it secures *actual graces* to the soul, and thus gives us ardor and strength for the performance of good works, and weakens our evil inclinations. For, as material food gives to man energy, courage, and activity, so this spiritual food gives the soul supernatural energy, infuses into the soul new vigor for the practice of virtue, and a joyous activity in spiritual and supernatural life. And thus not only our fervor is increased, but also our inclination to evil and all our immoderate passions are checked.

3. The third effect of holy Communion worthily received is, that it cleanses the soul from *venial sins*, and preserves it from *mortal sin*. For, as bodily nourishment repairs the loss of vitality of the body, so this spiritual food restores the lost vitality of the soul. Now, what is it that lessens the supernatural vitality of the soul? It is chiefly venial sin. But as worthy Communion restores this lost vitality, it must cancel venial sins committed, preserve us from relapse, and thus purify us daily more and more from minor offences. As regards mortal sin, which is the death of the soul,

it is evident that worthy Communion is the best preservative against it, as material food is the ordinary remedy against physical death. And if you ask me why the Holy Eucharist affords this protection, I answer, that it is partly because it imparts to us abundant graces, and partly because it secures us the special benevolence of God, and consequently a very special and loving providence.

Such are, briefly stated, the fruits of worthy Communion. Now, I ask you, are they not most precious? Are they not calculated to ensure us the grace of final perseverance? Is not, therefore, the holy Communion, if often and worthily received, a sure pledge of eternal happiness? Should that not be a motive for us frequently and devoutly to approach this holy Sacrament? But, as frequent Communion cannot be permitted as long as we are not firmly resolved to abandon sin, let us now make this generous resolve, if we have not yet made it. Then there will be no hindrance to our frequent Communion. And with every Communion sanctifying grace will be increased and consolidated in your hearts, and in the same measure the hatred of sin and union with God will be strengthened. Thus our salvation will be more and more secured; and, what is our only consolation in this vale of tears, we may confidently look forward to a happy death and everlasting life. Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

THE PROXIMATE OCCASION OF SIN.

"Lord, save us, we perish."—Matt. viii. 25.

THE disciples of Our Lord had, on this occasion, no reason to fear. They had not rashly exposed themselves to the danger, but had simply followed their Divine Master, and had Him in their midst who rules the storms and tempests. We, in like manner, need not fear, when, not our own recklessness, but the duty of our calling, exposes us to the storm of temptation. For then our blessed Lord, who brings us into the danger Himself, is with us, and we are sure of His assistance, if we only put our whole trust in Him. But the case is quite different when we expose our salvation to danger without necessity. It is my intention to-day seriously to warn you, as far as depends on you, carefully to shun all dangers and occasions of grievous sin.

By *occasion of sin*, I understand any external circumstance that entices or stimulates to sin; and the greater the enticement or impulse to sin, the nearer and the more dangerous is the occasion. If a given occasion exercises so strong an influence on a certain individual that he generally succumbs, or is likely to succumb under it, that occasion for such an individual is a *proximate* one. Such an occasion every one is bound, under pain of grievous sin, as much as lies in his power, to shun, because, in this case, flight is simply

necessary to avoid sin, whatever may be the apparent excuses of the sinner.

I shall, therefore, try to put before you—

1. *The necessity of fleeing the occasion of sin;*
2. *The vanity of the excuses generally made by the sinner.*

I. THE NECESSITY OF FLIGHT.

The necessity of fleeing the proximate occasion of sin, as far as in us lies, cannot be denied without contradicting the teaching of *Holy Scripture*, of the *Fathers* of the Church, and of *reason* itself.

1. This necessity is manifest from *Holy Scripture*. Thus immediately in the Book of Genesis, on the first pages of Holy Writ, we read that God commanded our first parents not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now, if they had kept aloof from the tree, they would not have broken the command. But Eve did not keep aloof, and when the serpent tried his persuasion upon her, she did not withdraw, but entered into a conversation with him, and thus she became aware that the tree was beautiful to behold, and that, consequently, its fruit must be sweet to the taste. "And she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat" (Gen. iii. 6). Now, if the sight of the forbidden fruit proved so fatal to Eve, who was still in the blissful state of original innocence, and not yet subject to the rebellious law of concupiscence, need we wonder, then, that we, who are naturally inclined to evil, in consequence of original sin, should fall into grievous sin, if we thrust ourselves into the danger?

We also read that God, in the Old Law, forbade the Israelites, together with idolatry, the use of carved images (Exod. xx. 4; Deut. iv. 16). And why so?

Why did God forbid them what is permitted to us? Because carved images, which serve us for edification, were for them an occasion of the sin of idolatry.

Many such passages, clearly expressing the necessity of fleeing the occasion of sin, are to be found in Holy Writ. In one place (Ecclus. iii. 27) we read: "He that loveth danger shall perish in it." In another (Ibid. xxi. 2): "Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent, for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee." In a third passage (Prov. vi. 27, 28): "Can a man hide fire in his bosom, and his garments not burn? Or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?"

But the most forcible of all are the expressions used by Christ Himself, on the flight of the occasion. "If thy right eye scandalize thee," He says, "pluck it out, and cast it from thee. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than thy whole body be cast into hell" (Matt. v. 29, 30; xviii. 8, 9). If, therefore, what is as dear to you as your right eye or your right hand, is, at the same time, for you an occasion of sin, flee it, whatever sacrifice it may cost you, for it is better to suffer the greatest temporal loss than to expose yourself to the loss of your soul and the eternal torments of hell-fire. From this we may justly conclude that it is in glaring contradiction with the teaching of Holy Scripture to assert that it is not necessary to flee all proximate occasions of sin.

2. And this same assertion is in flagrant contradiction with the teaching of the *Holy Fathers* of the Church, who unanimously and most forcibly insist on the necessity of fleeing the occasion of sin. St. Chrysostom, to quote only one, says on the point in ques-

tion: "Flee not only adultery, but every licentious look. Avoid not only evil thoughts, but also every wanton laugh and every impure desire. If you will guard against drunkenness, flee dainties and luxurious feasts. We must observe the snares, and not approach them; we must foresee the precipice, and keep aloof from it. It will be our best safe-guard, if we flee not only sin itself, but, also, whatever leads to sin."

3. But though the Scriptures and the Fathers were silent on the matter, *reason* itself would be sufficient to convince us of the necessity of fleeing the occasion of sin. Or does reason not teach us that the man who needlessly thrusts himself into the proximate occasion of sin is sure to fall? For one evidently falls the more easily, the greater is the incitement to sin, the less the horror for sin, and the weaker the assistance of grace. Now, reason and experience tell us that the proximate occasion enhances the incitement and lessens the horror for sin, and weakens the efficacy of grace.

a. The proximate occasion *enforces the passion for sin;* for the natural propensity to sin is heightened by the incitement which the occasion produces. Thus the presence of a person who is the cause of temptation exercises greater influence than the thought of the same person when absent. And the drunkard's weakness, which is easily overcome at his own fireside, is sure to succumb in the dram-shop.

b. The *horror for sin is very weak,* if it exists at all, in the man who voluntarily seeks the occasion; for if he had the least hatred of sin, he would not put himself in proximate danger of committing it.

c. Finally, the *assistance of grace is wanting.* For, since God gives His grace to the humble, and resists the proud, He will certainly withdraw His grace from us in proportion as we confide in our own strength.

But the man who, without necessity, throws himself into the proximate occasion of sin, confides immoderately in his own strength; for if he did not, he certainly would not expose himself to the immediate danger of sin. The grace which he receives from Almighty God is the inspiration to avoid the occasion. If he neglects this salutary warning, can he claim the grace to withstand the shock of temptation? God has nowhere promised such a grace. Hence the sinner so easily falls when he needlessly puts himself in the occasion of sin.

Is this not the constant teaching of *experience?* Is it not commonly an external circumstance which leads us into sin, and holds us fettered in the same? What was it, my dear friend, that led you, for instance, into impurity? Was it not curiosity of the eyes, or a bad book, or the society of bad companions, or dangerous company-keeping? When was it that you fell into the habit of drinking? Was it not when you began to frequent parties and drinking-houses? And what is the cause of your continual relapses into the same sins, and of those habitual sins, which have become, as it were, a second nature to you? Is it not the occasion, which you would never abandon?

If, then, you would preserve your souls from sin, you must flee the proximate occasion as far as possible. He who voluntarily, without any necessity, goes into the proximate occasion of grievous sin, by this very fact makes himself guilty of a grievous sin. And why? Because he loves the danger; and he who loves the danger loves the sin itself, which is manifestly a grievous sin. This is, for the rest, the express teaching of the Church, who refuses absolution to those who will not abandon the proximate occasion of grievous sin, when it is possible for them to do so. Such occa-

sions are, particularly, private and especially nightly meetings of persons of different sexes. Such meetings are in themselves, abstracting from all other sins which attend them, grievous sins, as the voluntary proximate occasion to mortal sin. And the excuses which are generally alleged to justify such occasions are but vain illusions.

II. VANITY OF THE EXCUSES.

I wish it always to be borne in mind that I speak of the proximate occasion of *mortal* sin, such as private meetings of persons of different sexes; courtships carried on without intention, or at least a well-grounded hope of marriage, or without the knowledge and consent of parents; frequenting balls and similar entertainments without the company of parents or some persons who are suited to take their place; in short, all occasions which are a strong incentive to sin. Now, those who live in such occasions are commonly obstinate, and dread and hate nothing more than to abandon them. They therefore take refuge to all manner of excuses.

1. It is of no rare occurrence that a person who is required by his spiritual director to shun such occasions answers: "I have *no bad intention* in going to such a place; I do not go to sin; God forbid! I only go for amusement's sake." Is such an excuse admissible? Can the confessor accept it and withdraw his injunction? By no means; for the reason that the intention of mere amusement is no excuse. Is it lawful, for instance, to expose one's self to manifest danger of death for the sake of amusement? No one will say that is lawful. And yet the supernatural life of the soul is of more account than the physical life of the body. Can it, then, be lawful, for pleasure's sake, to expose one's self to the imminent danger of falling

into mortal sin, and thus forfeiting the supernatural life of the soul?

2. When the sinner finds that this first excuse will not prevail, he commonly takes refuge to a second: "I intend now," he says, "with God's help, not to commit that sin any more. I shall be *careful on such occasions* in future not to fall into sin. But people would talk if I at once gave up keeping company, or frequenting the tavern, or visiting such a house, or associating with such companions." What think you of such an excuse, my dear brethren? Does it hold? No—and why? Because, in spite of all protestation, it is not true that such a sinner is resolved to avoid sin. For, if he were resolved, he would shun the occasion. He who does not wish to burn will not thrust himself into the fire; and he who will avoid sin will not rush into the immediate danger. As to the talk it might create, if the sinner abandoned the occasion, it deserves no consideration; for people will talk any way. Whether he continues in the occasion, or abandons it, he will be talked of; with this difference, however, that, if he continues in the occasion, he will be justly reproached; if he breaks it off, he will be unjustly criticised.

3. But instead of humbly submitting, the sinner will sometimes reply, or, at least, think in his own mind: "This *confessor is too strict*. For a long time I have regularly confessed the same sins, and have as regularly received absolution." But, my dear friend, did you know that you were bound, under grievous sin, to quit the proximate occasion? If you knew it, your confessions and Communions were unworthy and sacrilegious. You deceive yourself, if you think you have been absolved. Perhaps your confessor, falsely judging that you were rightly disposed, pronounced the words of

absolution over you. But, with all that, you have not been absolved; your sins have not been actually remitted, and could not be remitted, for lack of purpose of amendment, which belongs to the necessary disposition to obtain forgiveness.

But let me ask you, my dear friend, how comes it that you have always received absolution? Does it not come from the fact that you have not been sincere in your confessions, that you did not take the matter seriously? You are probably not one of those who are concerned to choose one regular confessor, to whom their whole conscience might be open. You went from one to another, and always to those who knew least about you, and who, you thought, were not likely to put many questions. You confessed your sins as superficially as possible, and passed over in silence the proximate occasion, which you were strictly bound to confess. Such a confession is a fraud and a sham; and such an absolution, obtained by deceitful means, has no value before Almighty God, but only heaps new guilt on the unfortunate soul of the sinner. Remove the occasion, then, and come and make a general confession of the time you have lived in this state. Unless you do this, there is no salvation for you; you will be irretrievably lost!

From what I have said, beloved brethren, you, doubtless, perceive how necessary it is to flee the occasion of sin, and how vain are the excuses which are commonly made by the sinner. Be wise, then, my dear friends, while you may, and bring the salvation of your souls into security by carefully avoiding all proximate occasions. For by the conscientious flight of the occasion alone will you have a sure proof that you detest sin and are seriously concerned for the salvation of your souls. Follow the earnest warning

of Jesus Christ, your Saviour. If thy right eye should scandalize thee, pluck it out; and if thy right hand should scandalize thee, lop it off; for it is better, with one eye or with one hand, to enter the kingdom of God, than that body and soul should be consigned to everlasting torments. Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

SCANDAL.

"But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat."—Matt. xiii. 25.

By the wheat is here understood the good, while the cockle signifies sinners in general, particularly seducers, and those more especially who by word and example give scandal to others. For it is such who, most of all, impede the growth of the good seed. I will, therefore, to-day endeavor to awaken your horror of this most detestable and destructive of all sins—the sin of *scandal*.

By scandal we understand words, deeds, or omissions, which by their nature are calculated to cause the fall of others and lead them into sin. Such are impure or uncharitable language; impious or blasphemous expressions, whether against the honor due to God, or against faith; smutty songs, and loose behavior; quarrelling, swearing, and the like sins of parents in the presence of their children. To make one's self guilty of this sin of scandal, it is not necessary that one should have the intention of seducing his neighbor; for this would be a sin characteristic of the arch-fiend himself. Nor is it necessary actually to bring one's neighbor into sin; but, to contract the guilt of this sin, it is sufficient wilfully to do, or say what, of its nature, is apt to lead our neighbor into sin. The intention or effect, therefore, does not enter the question.

This supposed, I say that scandal is a most detestable sin, because it implies—

1. A most crying, *spiritual robbery;*
2. A ruthless, *spiritual murder;*
3. An irreparable, *everlasting crime.*

1. A SPIRITUAL ROBBERY.

A poor man, who lived in a sequestered place, had once, with much toil and privation, during the summer, collected fuel and provisions for the winter. He carefully stored up his scanty supplies in his humble cottage, and piled up the fuel in convenient vicinity. But behold, one of his neighbors looks upon his comfort with an evil eye. In a stormy night he slinks to the poor man's cottage and sets fire to the heap of fuel. In a few moments the hut itself is in flames, and the poor man sees the fruits of his labor reduced to ashes, and himself and his family reduced to the alternative of beggary or starvation. What a devilish crime! What a crying injustice! But the crime committed by the giver of scandal is much more diabolical, his injustice much more flagrant; for he robs his neighbor not merely of his temporal gains, of the necessaries of this temporal life, but of his spiritual earnings, which are much more valuable and necessary.

1. The man who gives scandal robs his victim of all his *merits*—the fruits of all his prayers; all his almsdeeds; all his victories over the world, the devil, and the flesh; in short, of the fruits of all his good works. He exposes him, therefore, to the danger, not of temporal, but of eternal death; for the man who is stripped of all supernatural merits is in imminent danger of eternal damnation. And what is the motive which animates the giver of scandal? It is the basest passions, commonly sensuality and lust, which goad him on to this sacrilegious robbery. Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, is it not most atrocious, and vile at the same time,

for the sake of a momentary and degrading pleasure to rob one's neighbor of the fruits of years of toil and labor in the service of God, to bring him to extreme spiritual poverty, and to expose him to the imminent danger of eternal death?

2. He who scandalizes his neighbor deprives him not only of his merits, but also of his *freedom*—the freedom of the children of God, which Christ has purchased for us with His precious blood. By seducing his neighbor to sin he delivers him up to the slavery of Satan. In past ages, beloved brethren, when the curse of slavery still existed in all its horrors, there were pirates, whose business it was to hunt down the poor negroes and carry them off into the slave-market. In order to capture them they made use of all kinds of wiles and devices. They landed in the vicinity of their villages, visited their huts under the guise of friendship, gave them presents to gain their confidence, gradually enticed them on board their ships, weighed anchor, and hurried them off into their dreadful captivity. What must have been the grief and despair of those wretched creatures, when they saw their native country vanish in the distance, when they saw themselves forever wrested from parents, and relatives, and friends! Was that not fiendish cruelty?

But the cruelty of him who gives scandal, considered in the light of faith, is incomparably greater than that of the slave-trader. The slavery into which he drags his neighbor is much more terrible; for he delivers him up, not to a fellow-man, but to Satan, the most cruel of slave-holders, who is only intent on making his victims miserable for time and eternity, whose only endeavor is to wrest them forever from God, their Father; from Mary, their loving Mother; from

the saints and angels, their brothers and friends; and to thrust them into the abyss of misery for all eternity.

What an act of cruelty, what a detestable crime, is scandal! But what if the giver of scandal is the victim's own father, or mother? We cannot find words to qualify such unnatural cruelty. It is a hellish crime, for which the language of man has no name. And yet, how often does it happen! Are there not parents who do not blush to break out into quarrels, and strife, and abuse, and all manner of filthy and blasphemous language, in the presence of their own children? Are there not such who professedly, before the very eyes of their children, neglect the duties of their religion? Are there not fathers who, at a late hour of the night, come home drunk, and turn their houses into a hell of confusion? Such parents rob their children of the precious gift of their innocence. Scandal is, therefore, a most horrid spiritual robbery; but it is no less a most atrocious—

II. SPIRITUAL MURDER.

As the soul gives its life to the body, so sanctifying grace gives its life to the soul. Without grace man cannot perform a single meritorious work. Without grace, therefore, the soul is dead; dead to all that is supernatural; dead for heaven. Grace is, then, the true supernatural life of the soul. Hence, leading his neighbor into sin, which deprives man of sanctifying grace, the giver of scandal takes away the true life of the soul, and is, consequently, not only a robber, but a murderer—a *murderer of souls.*

Once a prisoner who had been sentenced to death was led to the place of execution. The people, who had assembled in large crowds, and knew nothing of the crime he had committed, showed great sympathy

with the victim. But when the sentence was read, and they learned that he had poisoned his own brother, their sympathy was changed into indignation. If, then, beloved brethren, the man who held out the cup of poison to his own brother, and thus took away the life of his body, deserves to fall by the executioner's hand, what punishment does he deserve who poisons the soul of his neighbor, and thus takes away its supernatural life? Is not he whose soul he kills truly his brother?

'Tis true, the natural life of the body, if once lost, is irrevocably lost, while the supernatural life of the soul can, by the mercy of God, be regained by contrition and penance. But must we not say, on the other hand, that the supernatural life is infinitely more precious than the natural? Our natural life has cost Almighty God but one word, one act of His all-powerful will; but what price did He pay to purchase our supernatural life? For its ransom He had to descend on this earth, to take to Himself this nature of ours, and become man; to live in poverty, contempt, and suffering for three and thirty years, and finally to die an ignominious death on the cross. Our supernatural life has cost Him the last drop of His precious blood. What, then, should be the judgment of the seducer who has robbed his neighbor of that treasure which could only be purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ?

But, my dear brethren, the giver of scandal not only commits an outrage against his neighbor, but also infinitely *grieves his Lord and Saviour*, Jesus Christ. For, abstracting from the fact that he tramples under foot His precious blood, he inflicts a most cruel wound on the most tender and Sacred Heart of Jesus. I cannot but recall to mind at this moment the love which our blessed Lord bore to the innocent children. It

seems to me as if I beheld Him at this instant—how He gathers them around Him and lovingly caresses them. But there comes the seducer, the emissary of the devil, and snatches the innocent little ones from His loving embrace. O ruthless murderer, do you not hear the voice of Jesus Christ, which cries out to you beseechingly: "Oh, spare those precious souls, that are so dear to Me, that I have purchased with My blood, that I have nourished with My flesh, that I have destined to surround My throne in heaven!" Yes, the seducer hears the voice of Jesus Christ, but heeds it not. He recks not the infinite love, not the precious blood, not the adorable body of the Son of God! It is the same to him whether those little ones, so dear to the Heart of Jesus, will be eternally happy, or eternally miserable. His only aim is to gratify his beastly lusts. Let him go, then, and exult in his shameful victory, that he has gratified his passion, that he has murdered innocent souls, that he has frustrated the blood of Jesus Christ! But woe, woe, the while! The blood of his murdered brethren will cry to heaven for vengeance! The blood of Jesus Christ will arise in judgment against him!

The giver of scandal is, then, a thief and a murderer in one person; but, what makes his crime the more atrocious, is that it is not a passing crime, that it does not die with him, but lives after him, and is, in a certain true sense, an—

III. EVERLASTING CRIME.

What would you say, beloved brethren, of a man who is infected with a deadly contagious disease, who, from unaccountable *levity*, or fiendish *malice*, would intrude himself into a company of healthy people? Would you not justly consider such a one, in the first

case, a dangerous enemy of his fellow-men; in the second case, a monster of wickedness? And is that not the living likeness of the seducer, or giver of scandal? Is he not infected with a contagious disease? Is he not smitten with the disease of vice—of lust, of avarice, intemperance, infidelity? And does he not, in like manner, intrude himself into the society of others, with the malicious purpose of infecting them? Or, if he has not this express diabolical intention of corrupting others, does he not make himself guilty of the most reckless levity, by exposing others to the immediate danger of contagion?

Let us put the most favorable case, in which only a few, say, four or five persons, were infected by his influence. Will the contagion confine itself to those few? Will it not spread apace? Is it not to be feared that each of these will corrupt others, and these, again-others in their turn? Cast a stone into the placid water; can you prevent the undulations from taking still greater and greater dimensions? Put a decayed apple amid a heap of sound ones; can you preserve them from infection? Are we fallen men, who are naturally inclined to evil, less subject to corruption and contagion? There is, therefore, not only the greatest danger, but the greatest likelihood, that the infection will spread, and that the victims will be indefinitely multiplied. Scandal is, therefore, a crime whose direful effects are unfathomable.

To the giver of scandal we may truly apply the words of the Scriptures (Heb. xi. 4): "Though dead, he still speaketh." Yes, ruthless murderer of souls, when you have long since breathed your last, when your body lies mouldering in the grave, when your name is long since forgotten, you will still speak. By the lips of those whom you have seduced, you will

continue to curse and blaspheme. You will continue to utter filthy language by the mouth of those who have been seduced by your victims, and you will have a share in their sins for generation after generation! Great God! What judgment awaits the seducer! What hell is deep enough for the corrupter of souls! Now you understand, beloved brethren, the import of the words of Our Saviour: "Woe to the world because of scandals! Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh! It were better for him, that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. xviii. 6, 7).

Scandal is, therefore, a most detestable sin, a sin which can be more easily avoided than repaired. Beware of scandal, then, beloved brethren. And if you have had the misfortune to fall into this dreadful sin, and to have drawn away souls from God, despond not; but, after you have done penance and confessed your sins, try the more earnestly by your good example to bring back souls to God. God in His infinite mercy will accept the good will of your contrite hearts, will forget your former transgressions; and, if you persevere in your loyalty to Him, He will bring you to everlasting life. Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

THE CHURCH.

"The kingdom of God is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field."—Matt. xiii. 31.

THE kingdom of God in this parable signifies the *Church* of Christ. Our blessed Lord wishes to illustrate the small beginning and the wonderful growth of the Church, in which all the nations of the earth are destined to find peace and happiness. This grand prophecy of Christ, as history teaches us, has been to this day literally fulfilled. It is your privilege, beloved brethren, to belong to this glorious Church of Christ. But do you duly appreciate this privilege? You believe, it is true, that to obtain salvation it is necessary to belong to the true Church of Christ, and that the Catholic Church is the only true Church; but are you familiar with the arguments upon which your faith rests? Now, though it is true that this unshaken faith, together with a true Christian life, is sufficient for the peace and security of our souls, yet it cannot be denied that it greatly adds to our internal happiness as Christians to have a clear and thorough knowledge of the foundation on which our faith is based. I have, therefore, determined to-day briefly to recall to your minds the arguments which underlie our belief in the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ. Thus you shall be strengthened in your faith, and be enabled to answer the objections which in word and print are not seldom raised against the Catholic Church. The

arguments on which our faith in the Catholic Church is based we shall find contained in the answer to the following two questions, which will form the subject and division of my discourse—

1. *Did Christ establish a Church?*
2. *Which is the true Church established by Christ?*

I. HAS CHRIST ESTABLISHED A CHURCH?

1. Christ is, as you know, the Son of God, true God and true man, our Redeemer, or, as He Himself says: "the way, the truth, and the life;" the way upon which we must walk; the truth which we must believe; and the life which must quicken our souls, if we would attain our supernatural end. But Christ is the Redeemer, not only of those with whom He Himself conversed here on earth, but of *all* men of all ages. It was, therefore, His duty to provide that not only those of His own time, but all men of all times might find the way, the truth, and the life, and thus be made partakers of the work of Redemption. For this end, therefore, He must have provided some reliable and efficacious means.

This truth will become evident to you by the following comparison. Let us imagine a town suffering from scarcity of water. How is the exigency to be remedied? A large basin is erected on an eminence commanding the whole town, and a sufficient supply of ever-flowing water is introduced. But this is not enough. The water must be brought in communication with the streets, and houses, and public places. Conduits and pipes must be laid in all directions to conduct the water to all parts of the town. Then only is the work supposed to be complete, when every family and individual of the town can conveniently draw from the general supply collected in the tank.

Since the fall of our first parents a similar scarcity has prevailed upon the earth. By sin the way, the truth, and the life were lost. The whole world was pining for the waters of eternal salvation—the waters of truth, and grace, and life everlasting. To remedy this dreadful spiritual drought, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, took to Himself our nature and became man. The waters of eternal life were again forthcoming in copious supplies. But if the Son of God had merely confined Himself to this, the evil would not have been remedied. He must, therefore, have taken other measures; He must have opened some channels to bring us into communication with the fountains of salvation; He must have made provision that not only those of His own time, and His own country, but also those of all times and of all lands, should be brought in living contact with the way, the truth, and the life, and thus be made partakers of the saving work of Redemption; He must have left us a safe and effectual means of applying to our souls the fruits of Redemption.

2. And this He has done, indeed. For this end He established His Church, a society whose object it is to bring us in contact with the way, the truth, and the life, and dispense to us the fruits of His divine work. He gathered around Him, as you know, disciples, and put them under the guidance of St. Peter as their supreme head with the words: "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church" (Matt. xvi. 18). Thus He has formed a perfectly organized society. And for what end? For no other than to be our faithful guide to the way, the truth, and the life. For when He said to His Church, in the person of St. Peter and the other apostles: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and

of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19), He gave them and their successors the charge to preach His doctrine and administer His sacraments to all men, i.e., to make all men partakers of the work of Redemption. And to facilitate for them the execution of this charge, He assured them of His never-failing assistance: "And, behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world."

Hence it follows that Christ established a Church to dispense to us the fruits of the Redemption; but it follows at the same time that, in order to become partakers of those saving fruits, and save our souls, we must in a true sense belong to the Church of Christ; for he who, in no sense, belongs to the Church of Christ is cut off from those channels which are destined to communicate to us the saving waters of eternal life. Such a one, therefore, has no share in the fruits of the Redemption, and if he die in this state, he is irrevocably lost.

Now, of the numerous Christian communities that exist, and call themselves churches—

II. WHICH IS THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

This is the second question which we proposed to answer. The answer is familiar to you: The Holy Roman Catholic Church, to which we have the happiness to belong. For, she alone possesses those marks which Christ has impressed on His Church. She is *one*, *holy*, *catholic*, and *apostolic*. Thus the true Church of Christ has been characterized by the Apostles' Creed; by the Nicene Creed; by the Fathers of the Church, the pillars who upheld her in the evil days of persecution; by the martyrs, who shed their blood for her sake; by those apostolic men who planted her standard among the nations—by St. Patrick in Ireland,

St. Augustine in England, St. Boniface in Germany—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

1. The Church of Christ must therefore, first of all, be *one*.

a. She must be one in her *teaching*, which can admit of no contradictions; for the teaching of the Church is the teaching of Christ Himself. But it is evident that Christ cannot teach one thing to-day and a different thing to-morrow, that He cannot contradict Himself. The teaching of His Church must, therefore, be one, and always consistent with itself. Therefore, the Apostle writes to the Corinthians: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you; but that you be perfect in the same mind, and in the same judgment" (I. Cor. i. 10). And in another place he insists on "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. iv. 5). Since, therefore, the existing Churches contradict each other in their teaching, it is manifest that not all, nor even several of them, but *only one* is the true Church of Christ; for Christ's Church cannot teach conflicting doctrines.

b. The Church of Christ must also be one in her *supreme head*. For Christ, by the words: "Thou art Peter [the rock], and upon this rock I will build My Church" (Matt. xvi. 18), made St. Peter supreme ruler of His Church. Therefore the Scriptures compare the Church now with an organic body (I. Cor. xii. 13), now with a kingdom (John xviii. 36), now with a flock (John x. 16). But a body evidently supposes a head, and a kingdom a ruler, and a flock a shepherd. St. Cyprian, who died in the year 258, argues from the nature of God and the constitution of the Church that she must needs be one. "One God," he says, "one Christ, one Mediator; one truth, one Church; one

episcopate, though many bishops,—as there is but one sun with many rays. But the foundation of this oneness," he adds, "Christ has laid in Peter, to whom he has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven and consigned His entire flock." The Church of Christ must, therefore, have this twofold unity—unity of doctrine and unity of government; in other words, it must have one faith and one head.

Now, this twofold unity we find in the Catholic Church. She is one in her *teaching*. By the teaching of the Church we here understand, not the views and opinions of individual priests and bishops, which may differ in certain non-essential matters; but the doctrine which is taught by the universal Church, i. e., by all the bishops of the Church in union with the pope, their supreme head. The teaching of the Catholic Church, thus understood, is one and the same all the world over. For there is everywhere in the Church one and the same *Christian doctrine*, laid down in the various catechisms in use, and taught to the faithful; and whoever ventures to teach new doctrine, contrary to the universal teaching, and to defend it obstinately, is excluded from the communion of the Church.

The Catholic Church is, moreover, one in her *supreme head*, who is the pope, the sovereign pontiff, or bishop of Rome; whence she is called the Roman Catholic Church. But here we must remember that the pope is, not only in name or title, but in truth and reality, the supreme head and ruler of the Church. For every Catholic Christian is bound in conscience to submit to the pope in all matters which regard faith and morals, or the government of the Church.

2. The true Church of Christ must be *holy*. This attribute of the Church does not require that all her members should be saints; but it demands that she

possess the *means of sanctification*, and embrace within her fold a goodly *number of saints*, that is, men and women of more than ordinary sanctity. She must possess ample means of sanctification—the sacred teaching of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; the sacraments of Christ, the channels of grace and sanctity—because she has been founded for the sanctification of the world. She must in all ages embrace true saints within her fold, because the means of grace entrusted to her are of divine origin and must, therefore, be highly efficacious, and productive of sanctity. Otherwise those divine means of grace might be compared to a medical remedy enjoying the highest recommendations, but never actually producing health. The Church of Christ must, therefore, be marked with this twofold note of sanctity—holiness in her means of sanctification, and extraordinary holiness in a certain number of her members.

And this twofold mark of holiness the Catholic Church bears conspicuously imprinted upon her. And first, with regard to the *means of sanctification*, we know that she is in possession of the *Seven Sacraments* instituted by Jesus Christ, whose aim and efficacy it is to sanctify all men at all times and in all conditions. We know that her *teaching* is holy. Can her enemies name a single pope or a single Council approved by the pope, that has at any time taught a doctrine not in keeping with the strictest laws of morality. But to attribute, as is often done, the sins and vices of certain individual Catholics to the Church is an injustice; for it is unjust to make a whole community responsible for the faults of individual members, unless the community as such causes or sanctions the transgressions of its members. But does the Church cause or sanction the wickedness of bad Catholics? Are they wicked be-

cause they are Catholics? Are they wicked because they observe the teaching of the Church? Are they not wicked precisely because they do not observe the Church's teaching? Those so-called liberal Catholics, who throw their faith overboard, do they do so for conscience' sake? Do they not give up the practice of their faith, in order freely to indulge their passions, and do what they may?

That the Catholic Church embraces many true *saints* within her pale, no one who has any knowledge of her history will deny. Nay, one need only glance at her calendar to convince one's self of the fact. For the names that we read there are all, without exception, the names of Catholic saints. Since, therefore, our Church is holy, both in the means of sanctification which she employs, and in a considerable number of her members, she evidently possesses also the mark of sanctity.

3. No less conspicuously is the mark of catholicity stamped on the true Church of Christ. She was founded by Christ for all men, to make all men partakers of the fruits of the Redemption through Jesus Christ. All men are called to her fold; therefore she must be *accessible to all.* She excludes none; her gates are open to all; she is no national institution, but gathers all nations within her bosom. Therefore she must, according to the intention of Christ, be sufficiently *represented in all places.* For, as all men are called to her fold, it must be possible and comparatively easy for all to find her and recognize her. But how could that be possible unless she were sufficiently represented in all countries, either by her members or by her history?

Now, where is the Church which bears this mark of catholicity; which is *accessible to all, represented all*

over the world? It is the Roman Catholic Church, and she alone, which is of no nation, nor tongue, nor tribe, nor caste, but embraces all peoples, and all lands, and all conditions of men; whose members and respresentatives are scattered all over the world, and which, despite heresy, schism, and persecution, to-day numbers more than all the Christian sects taken together. Therefore she is called *the Catholic* Church by way of excellence—a title which none of her adversaries can contest without exposing themselves to public ridicule.

4. Finally, the true Church of Christ must be *apostolic*. She must be based on the foundation of the apostles. She must date back to the apostolic times. She cannot be a branch, cut off from the trunk; she must still draw her life-giving nourishment from the stem of which the apostles of Jesus Christ are the roots. She must have a history of more than eighteen hundred years.

But the Catholic Church possesses also this mark. She is built upon the foundation of the apostles, from whom she dates her history. For we have an uninterrupted line of popes, from Leo XIII. to St. Peter. Nor is the Catholic Church a branch severed from the trunk. She draws her life and her strength from the stem. That is evident to all who are even superficially acquainted with her fruitful work on home and foreign missions, her numberless charitable institutions, her martyrs who have continued to shed their blood even to our own day. Her very existence, threatened in vain by her most bitter and powerful adversaries, must convince every observer that in her there is life and strength from on high. With pride we look back at her history of more than eighteen hundred years. She alone is the stem; all others are branches and twigs cut off from her in the lapse of time.

Our Church is, therefore, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Since, therefore, she has the marks which Christ gave to His Church, she is undoubtedly the true Church, which dispenses to us the fruits of our Redemption. Rejoice, then, beloved brethren, that you have the good fortune to belong to the true Church, which not only points out to you the true way that leads to heaven, and invites you to walk upon it, but also provides you with all the necessaries for your pilgrimage. But in your joy forget not the gratitude you owe to God for so great and liberal a favor. Endeavor to prove your gratitude in that way which is most pleasing to Almighty God—by showing reverence, love, and obedience to the Church, His representative on earth; by showing yourselves children worthy of such a mother.

For the Church, beloved brethren, is really your mother. She it is that in baptism brought you forth to a new supernatural life. And does she not continue to exercise all the duties of a mother towards you? Is it not she who, by the mouth of her pastors, instructs you in the faith and unceasingly exhorts you to its practice? Is it not she who, in the tribunal of penance, relieves you of the burden of your sins and restores the long looked-for peace to your hearts? Is it not she who nourishes your souls with the adorable flesh of the Son of man? Is it not she who blesses your nuptials and secures for you conjugal happiness? And how constant is her love! When, in the last hour, father and mother, wife and children, friends and kindred abandon you, the Church, your faithful mother, forsakes you not. But in the person of the priest, her minister, she bends over your couch, wipes the sweat of anguish from your brow, and cheers and strengthens you for the last journey. And after the

soul has already departed she busies herself about those earthly remains of ours. She accompanies our corpses, as though they were sacred objects, to their last resting-place, and bends over our graves to pray for the repose of our souls. Nor is this all; when our bodies have mouldered in the grave, she will still continue to raise her immaculate hands to heaven to sue for peace from God for our souls.

Does such a mother not deserve our love and gratitude? O holy Catholic Church, my mother, O true Jerusalem, city of peace! How could I ever forget thee! If I forget thee, Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten (Ps. cxxxvi. 5). In thee I shall live; in thee I shall breathe my last; on thy bosom I shall recline my dying head! And may my last words be: "I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church." Amen.

Septuagesima Sunday.

ENVY.

"And when they [the laborers] received it [their wages], they murmured against the master of the house."—Matt. xx. 11.

THE murmuring of those laborers manifestly proceeded from the motive of *envy*. They murmured because those who had come later received the same pay as themselves, who had worked from early morning, not because any wrong was done to themselves, who had received their dues. The cause of their grievance and discontent was, therefore, that those who had worked less were put on the same level with themselves. But such displeasure at another's good fortune is nothing else than envy.

Envy, beloved brethen, is a very common vice in the world; just as common as pride, selfishness, avarice, and ambition. For, as there is no good which may not become the object of our immoderate desire, so there is no good which may not be the object of our envy. Yet, in spite of the commonness of this vice, very little attention is paid to it, even by many apparently good Christians. They commonly consider it as a temptation from which it is hardly possible to be free, but not as that which it is in reality, a sinful disposition, which may lead its victim into the utter slavery of the devil. Hence I would caution you to-day against this vice, while I show you its hatefulness in its true color. I shall, therefore, prove to you that the vice of envy is *most hateful*, both (1) in its *nature* and (2) in its *effects*.

I. ITS NATURE.

Envy is hateful in its nature, because it is a very *base* and degrading vice. That it is a mean vice may be seen, first of all, from the fact that people are greatly *ashamed of it*, and are commonly more anxious to conceal it from the knowledge of men, than they are to hide their other vices. For, while there are infidels, drunkards, adulterers, and seducers, who do not blush publicly to acknowledge their crimes, and even at times to glory in them, you will rarely find an envious man who will own his defect, not to say, boast of it. Nay, there are some who are so much ashamed of this vice, that they can only with difficulty bring themselves to confess it in the tribunal of penance, and therefore pass it over in silence, exposing themselves to the danger of committing a sacrilege. But the cause of this silence is evidently that all are inwardly sensible that envy is a base and degrading vice.

Now, *what is envy*? It is an inward regret and displeasure at the welfare of our neighbor, because we imagine that, on account of his good fortune, he is more esteemed, more honored and distinguished than ourselves. Not every dissatisfaction or sorrow at our neighbor's welfare is envy. All depends on the motive of our regret. If, for instance, one is grieved at the temporal prosperity of a man, because one foresees that he will abuse it for evil purposes; or if one rejoices at the temporal misfortune of another, because he is thereby deprived of the power of doing evil; or if one regrets that his neighbor is more successful in business than himself; not because he would wish his neighbor to fare worse, but because he would wish to fare better himself, his joy or displeasure in those several cases is not envy. Envy essentially supposes ill-will towards our neighbor. The invidious man bears

a secret grudge in his heart towards his neighbor, and fosters the desire to see him humbled, impoverished, despised; and if his wish is fulfilled he maliciously rejoices at it. That is the nature, those are the symptoms of this hateful disease, but its source is always selfishness and pride.

Having considered the nature of the vice of envy, we may easily perceive that it is most disgusting and degrading, whether we consider it in the light of faith or in the light of reason.

1. Considered in the *light of faith* it is directly opposed to the highest duty of a Christian. The highest duty of a Christian is charity towards his neighbor, for St. Paul says (Rom. xiii. 8) that he who fulfils this duty fulfils the whole law. Now, is it not evident to all that envy is diametrically *opposed to charity?* For, what does charity demand of us? It demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. xxii. 39). And what does it mean, to love our neighbor as ourselves? It means that we should look upon the weal or woe of our neighbor as our own; and, therefore, that we should grieve with those that grieve, and rejoice with those that rejoice. And this charitable sentiment we must foster, not only towards our friends, but also towards our enemies, according to the words of Jesus Christ, who says: "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you" (Matt. v. 44). Are those the sentiments of the envious man? Are not his sentiments just the contrary? Does he not grieve at the prosperity of his neighbor, and rejoice at his misfortune? And do we not often find him disposed in like manner even towards his own friends, relatives, and benefactors? Can you, then, imagine anything that is more repugnant to charity, the first and highest

duty of a Christian, than this detestable vice of envy? Is it not, therefore, most shameful and degrading? For, that vice is the most shameful which is directly opposed to the characteristic virtue of one's state in life. Cowardice is the disgrace of the soldier, dishonesty of the business man, disloyalty of the husband or wife, impurity of the maiden. And what is the vice that brands with disgrace the Christian as such? It is that vice which is directly opposed to Christian charity—the unchristian and inhuman vice of envy.

2. I call this vice not only unchristian but also inhuman, because it contradicts, not only the teachings of divine faith but also *human reason* itself. And why? Because enmity, unless it goes beyond all bounds of apparent reason and justice, always supposes some cause, at least some seeming injustice or insult; but envy is a species of enmity without even the shadow of a pretext. Has the person whom you envy, and whose enemy you are, grieved you in aught? Not in the least. Your only grievance is that your neighbor is wealthier, happier, more influential, than you. How unreasonable and unjust is, therefore, your unfriendly disposition towards him!

Besides, experience teaches us that enmity, as a rule, can be appeased by gentleness, humility, and charity; but the vice of envy is commonly *implacable*. Nay, by favors and kind services, instead of being appeased, it is often only the more aroused, and takes greater dimensions. This we see clearly illustrated in the case of the envious Saul, towards his true friend David. What a malicious malady is, then, the vice of envy!

You must, moreover, remember that the envious man does *not* derive even *the least advantage* from this

hostile disposition. For, while all other sinners find at least some pleasure and satisfaction in the indulgence of their passions, the victim of envy finds none. He finds no pleasure, because envy is his torture, a worm that gnaws at his vitals, a fire that withers and consumes him; whence the Holy Ghost calls it a rot that preys upon the bones (Wisd. xiv. 30). He finds no satisfaction, because his envy can neither deteriorate his neighbor's condition, nor better his own circumstances. Envy is, therefore, a vice for which there is no excuse, nor even a plausible pretext.

From what I have thus far said, you see that envy is the purest malice. Therefore the Holy Fathers call it the devil's sin. No wonder, then, that people are so much ashamed of this sin, and are so loath to acknowledge it. But it will prove still more detestable, when we consider—

II. ITS EFFECTS.

Envy is a source from which numberless internal and external sins against our neighbor flow.

1. With regard to the *inward sins*, I will not mention those which the envious person commits by wishing his neighbor ill; for these are not the result of envy, but the sin of envy itself. What I would lay particular stress upon, are the *rash judgments* of which envy is the cause. As soon as this vice takes possession of a man's heart, it extinguishes all good will towards his neighbor. Hence the victim of envy misinterprets all his neighbor's actions and motives. All his neighbor's virtues are vices in his eyes; and though he worked miracles, the invidious man will not change his mind concerning him. Was that not the case with the Pharisees in regard to our blessed Lord, whom they envied for his influence with the people? Whatever He

did they misinterpreted and misrepresented. If He cured the sick on the Sabbath, He was guilty of profaning the Lord's day; if He worked miracles, He did so by the power of Beelzebub; if He went in quest of sinners to convert them, He was called their friend and abetter; if He declined to answer their deceitful questions, He was looked upon as a hypocrite; if He answered them, they called Him a blasphemer. And has not envy always the same effect? Has it not the same effect with you as it had in the case of the Pharisees? Ask yourself sincerely, my dear friend, and you will find that the true cause of almost all your rash judgments is envy.

But what makes those rash judgments still more sinful is the fact that they commonly do not confine themselves to the understanding, which they pervert, but descend into the heart and fill it with rancor, and disaffection, and *hatred*, and contempt of our neighbor. Was it not envy that inflamed the hatred of the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph, and inspired them to sell him into captivity? And does not by far the greater number of our grudges and disaffections spring from the same source?

2. But what of those sins against charity, which are *external?* What of the sins of the *tongue?* Experience proves that envy and jealousy are at the bottom of almost all detractions and slanders. And the defamation and slanderous talk caused by envy are the more pernicious, because the envious detractor or calumniator, in order to conceal his degrading vice, generally knows how to give himself an air of disinterestedness, and even of virtuous ardor. Another growth of envy is tale-bearing, and whispering, and exaggerated or false reports, spread for the purpose of creating dissensions, discords, and enmities between friends, who fall a prey

to the evil eye of the invidious. Thus Absolom, who envied his father David for his throne, spread evil reports about him among his subjects. And would to God, beloved brethren, that this devilish practice were a thing of the past!

3. That envy is the cause of many sins against our neighbor, not only in thought and word, but also in *deed*, we learn from many passages of Holy Scripture. Was it not envy which caused the wicked Cain to imbrue his hands in the blood of his innocent brother Abel? Was it not envy that instigated Saul to plot against the life of his most loyal servant, David? And, to be brief, was it not the envy and jealousy of the high-priests that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross? And to-day the vice of envy produces the same baleful effects as in those days. Oh, if we could look into the hearts of men, how many crimes might we discover which have had their origin in this shameful vice!

Envy is, therefore, both in its nature and in its effects, a most detestable vice; in its nature, because it is opposed to charity, the highest duty of a Christian, and contrary to reason and natural justice, and, consequently, most base and degrading; in its effects, because from it originate numberless internal and external sins, and even the greatest crimes. It behooves us, therefore, beloved brethren, carefully to guard against this vice, which poisons life's springs, imprints upon man the mark of the reprobate, and makes him a slave of Satan, according to the words of Wisdom: "By the envy of the devil death came into the world; and they follow him that are of his side" (Wisd. ii. 24, 25). As soon as a thought or feeling of displeasure at your neighbor's welfare arises within you, suppress it at once; for it is sheerest envy that then knocks at the door of your heart and demands entrance. If you do so, this vice will

never find admittance into your heart, and you will be free from a sin which degrades and dishonors so many ; and God will reward you with peace undisturbed in this life, and bliss everlasting in the next. Amen.

Sexagesima Sunday.

THE HEARING OF THE WORD OF GOD.

"The seed is the word of God."—Luke viii. 11.

OUR blessed Lord in to-day's Gospel compares the word of God with the seed that is sown by the husbandman; because, in the first place, as from good seed are produced good fruits, so from the word of God good works proceed; and because, moreover, without the seed of the word of God, man can no more bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, than an unsown field can yield a rich harvest. Hence is apparent what importance Jesus Christ attributes to the word of God, and how eagerly He desires that we should esteem it highly and make good use of it. I, therefore, believe that I can do nothing to-day that is more in accordance with the wishes of our blessed Lord than to exhort you to this practical esteem and proper use of the word of God, or the preaching of the Church. Therefore, I will briefly put before you the reasons why we should highly esteem and eagerly listen to the preaching of the word of God. And these are the chief motives which I wish to impress upon you—

1. The *excellence* of the word of God; for in it *God* speaks to us.

2. Its *necessity;* for in it God speaks the things *necessary* for our salvation.

3. Its *efficacy;* for in it God speaks to us *with power.*

I. EXCELLENCE.

The preaching of the Catholic Church, as the exposi-

tion of Catholic faith and morals, is of the same dignity and excellence as the *word of Christ* Himself. For it has the same source and the same contents.

1. The *source* of the Church's preaching, as of Christ's teaching, is God, the eternal Wisdom. For, as the teaching of Christ is the word of God, and proceeds from God, so also the preaching of the Catholic priest, as the exponent of the Catholic doctrine, is the word of God, and proceeds from God, who speaks to us through the mouth of His lawful ministers. Christ has established His Church to continue and perfect His work on earth. For this end He gave her the charge to announce His doctrine. "Go," He said to her ministers, in the persons of the apostles, "go, teach all nations; and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). And "he that heareth you, heareth Me" (Luke x. 16). And if any one "will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and publican" (Matt. xviii. 17). And the city which would refuse to hear the messengers of the word of God should not fare better than the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon. Accordingly, the Apostle admonishes the faithful to receive the preachers of the word of God as the "ministers of Christ" (I. Cor. iv. 1), and elsewhere he says: "For Christ we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us" (II.Cor. v. 20). The teaching of the Church is, therefore, the teaching of Christ, the word of God. Both alike proceed from God and have God as their common source.

2. But they have, likewise, both the same *contents*. The Catholic priest preaches the self-same doctrine which Jesus Christ taught. For Christ "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I. Tim. ii. 4). Therefore He charged His apos-

tles and their successors to teach all men "to observe all things, whatsoever He commanded" them (Matt. xxviii. 20). It was His duty, then, to provide that they should preserve His teaching entire, pure, and incorrupt; else they could not possibly discharge the office intrusted to them. And He actually made this provision by securing to His Church His never-failing assistance: "And behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (Ibid). He made provision, by promising and sending them the Holy Ghost, to "teach them all truth" (John xvi. 13). In short, He made provision by conferring on His Church the prerogative of infallibility, so that "the gates of hell should not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). It is the infallible Church which preserves the nations from error, by sending them pastors invested with her authority to teach, and by watching over their teaching, that they may not lead their flocks into error. As long, therefore, as the teaching of a duly appointed preacher of the gospel is not condemned by the Church, so long is it to be considered the teaching of the Church. But the teaching of the Church, as the infallible exponent of revelation, is the teaching of Christ Himself. The preaching of the Catholic Church has, therefore, not only the same source, but also the same contents as the word of Christ, and is, consequently, of the same dignity and excellence.

With what *reverence*, then, beloved brethren, should we listen to the word of God as announced by the preaching of the Church! If a man of high position and authority, from whom there is much to be hoped or feared, speaks, he is listened to with all marks of respect. But what is such a one compared with Christ, the Son of God, the infinite Majesty, from whom we have much to hope and much to fear! With what

reverence, then, should we listen to Christ's word, in the preaching of His Church! And yet, there are Christians who have little reverence for the word of God. Or is that reverence, when Christians take the liberty of criticising, slighting, or ridiculing what has been said by the preacher? Is that reverence, if one goes to the sermon as he would go to the theatre, to see and be seen, perhaps even to ruin souls, whom God wished to save by His divine word? Is that reverence, if a man or woman, who has hardly the most necessary elements of an education, assumes the delicate office of pronouncing judgment on the merits of a sermon? Is that, finally, reverence, if, instead of listening to the sermon, one is occupied in looking around, laughing, and talking; or even abandons himself to sleep? As you regard the word and the sacred person of Christ, then, beloved brethren, beware of such unbecoming behavior towards the divine word, and endeavor always to listen with reverence to the preaching of the Church. But you must, at the same time, hear the word of God with eagerness and perseverance, that is, you must be diligent and regular in attending the sermons; for, as they have the same dignity, so they have the same *necessity* for you as the divine word of Christ itself.

II. NECESSITY.

1. The hearing of the word of God is necessary for us, because in the preaching of the Church the bread, which is the spiritual *nutriment of the soul*, is broken to us. Nourishment is necessary for the support of life. Now, man has a twofold life—the life of the body and the life of the soul. The nutriment of the body is visible, material food; that of the soul is truth, is the word of God. The brute animal requires only

bodily food, as it possesses only bodily life, and consequently has no higher yearning. But man, who, besides the material life of the body, enjoys also a higher spiritual life, lives not on bread alone, but on truth, "on every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4). Six days of the week you are concerned for the food of the body, for the material, daily bread. Is it not meet, then, that at least on one day of the week you provide for the nourishment of the soul, and for that end regularly attend the sermons on Sundays and feasts of obligation? What kind of Christian life do those lead who, without cause and from mere carelessness, absent themselves from the sermons and content themselves, the whole year round, with hearing an early Mass? Do they not commonly lead a material, sensual life? Are they not often entirely engrossed in the indulgence of their animal passions; of their pride, avarice, and lust? And why? Because their spiritual life is allowed to languish for want of proper nutriment.

2. But the word of God is also necessary for us *to show us the way* upon which we have to walk to our last end. This present life of ours is, according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, only a pilgrimage of few and evil days. Its goal is everlasting life. "For we have not here a lasting city," as the Apostle says; "but we seek one that is to come" (Heb. xiii. 14). But the word of God, as the Psalmist tells us, is "a lamp to our feet, and a light to our paths" (Ps. cxviii. 105). It shows us the way that leads to our end. As the traveller who loses his way by night in the depth of a forest, and sees a light appear in the distance, is careful not to lose sight of it, but, using it as a guiding star, directs his course towards it, so we, in the denseness of prejudice and passion, must keep the light of

God's word always before us to mark our path. We must, therefore, not lose sight of this beacon-light of the word of God, which is raised by Jesus Christ in His Church to light us to our heavenly home; in other words, we must be constant and regular in attending the preaching of the Church. Thus we shall always clearly see our way to our last end.

3. It is not enough, however, to see the way that leads to heaven; we must also have the *strength* and courage necessary manfully and constantly to walk upon it; and to gain this constancy and vigor the hearing of the word of God is necessary for us. There is nothing which inspires us with such zeal and courage in the combat of salvation, as the considerations of the truths of our holy faith. It was these truths that subdued paganism and established the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And it is still the same truths which bring back sinners to penance and promote fervent Christians to ever higher degrees of virtue and perfection. And those are the truths that are brought home to us in the preaching of the word of God. True, it is possible by other means to come to the knowledge of those truths; but, to say nothing of the fact that they will never make the same impression as when conveyed by the living voice of the preacher, the preaching of the Church is the ordinary means ordained by God to teach the knowledge of His divine truth.

Besides, *experience* teaches that those who make it a point never to attend a sermon, though they may be well posted in other things, are commonly very ignorant in religious matters; in the science of their salvation, which is of all the most necessary. Hence so many doleful errors, which are taken by the world as first principles, and which govern its conduct. Such are the principles: that the happiness of man consists in wealth,

in the possession of money and other earthly goods; that every man is bound to seek his own interest, and that alone; that youth is the time to enjoy, and to go the whole round of earthly pleasures; that in the choice of a companion for life the first consideration is money, and that it matters very little where the ceremony of marriage is performed—whether before the public official, or the Protestant minister, or the Catholic priest; that for the children one school is as good as another, provided they are taught to get on in the world. Hence so much infidelity, the fruit of ignorance in religious matters, among the unlearned and half-educated, who know too little to see their own lack of knowledge. Hence so much religious indifference, which brutalizes man and fetters him to this earth. Woe to those that despise the word of God, for they shall be despised! The curse of darkness, of ignorance, of infidelity, of indifference and religious insensibility will hover over their path.

And how foolish, how ridiculous are the *excuses* alleged by such people! There are, particularly, two excuses which they have always at hand. The first excuse is: "I *do not need* sermons; I am not so ignorant; I know all that the preacher has to say." It were all very good, if one could truly say so; and it were much better still, if one not only knew, but also practised the truths of his faith, and lived according to his knowledge. But this latter is the least and the last concern of our learned friend. On the doing of the word of God he never reflects. He does not go to Mass on Sundays; he prays little, or not at all; he eats meat on Friday and enjoys his full meals on fast-days; he never goes to confession; in short, his life differs little from that of the pagan or Turk. And such a man has no need of sermons! Who, then, in

the world needs sermons, if not such people? But is it true that such people are so well instructed as they say? Only take the trouble of putting them a simple question of the Catechism, or the simplest objection against religion, and in a hundred cases to one they will stand in mute astonishment, confessing their ignorance; or, to help themselves out of the difficulty, they will launch into a torrent of abuse against the Church and religion, so that you could not say which is more to be wondered at—their ignorance or their effrontery.

The second excuse is: "I *have no time;* I must stay at home and mind my business." I know very well, beloved brethren, that there are many people, for instance, mothers and laborers, who cannot regularly attend sermons. But to say that the whole year round one has no time to hear a sermon is, in most cases, simply an untruth. If there should chance to be such a one here present, I would thus reason with him: My dear friend, you say you have no time to listen to a sermon; you must stay at home and attend to your business. Very well, but when there is question of an entertainment, or an excursion, or a public parade, there is no lack of time! Business goes on without you. You are able to find one to take your place; or, if not, it is all the same; you shut up and go, because you have a mind. It were a breach of honor, trust, and duty, if you missed such an occasion. But for the sermon you have no time!

Such excuses, beloved brethren, are vain and untrue; they do not touch the true reason why such people absent themselves from the preaching of the word of God. The words of Holy Scripture give us the true cause: those that belong to Jesus Christ "hear His voice" (John x. 3); and: "He that is of God heareth

the words of God. Therefore, you hear them not, because you are not of God" (John viii. 47). But you, my dear brethren, who are of God, who are God's children, continue in future to attend regularly at the preaching of God's word. Come and learn the fear of the Lord. "Come ye to Him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be confounded" (Ps. xxxiii. 6). For the word of God is not only sublime and holy, not only absolutely necessary, as the spiritual life-giving nourishment of your souls, but also efficacious.

III. EFFICACY.

1. The word which is preached to you by the ministry of the Church has the same efficacy as the word of Christ; for both, as we have seen, are the word of God, and must, therefore, have the same power. Christ sent His apostles into the world to preach His gospel, and behold, what a change came over the face of the earth! Whatever the world possesses of truth, *enlightenment*, and civilization, it owes to the preaching of the apostles. And how grand are the effects which the same word of God, as preached by their successors, produces to this day!

2. However, we must remember that the efficacy of the word of God, like the efficacy of the preaching of Christ, is *not always infallible*, as we see in the instance of the Scribes and Pharisees, who resisted the teaching of Christ. The word of God will have its effect only with those who co-operate with God's grace, or who, at least, do not obstinately resist it. It teaches us how to use our freedom; it urges us to use it rightly; but it does not take away our freedom for evil as well as good. In vain, then, will you hear the word of God, if, instead of applying it to yourself, you apply it to your neighbor, and say to yourself: Such a one should

take the lesson; that is just for him, or for her; if he or she is only present! In vain will you listen to the preaching of the gospel, if you thwart its efficacy by suppressing the remorse which it awakens in you. In vain will you frequent sermons, if you do not reflect upon what you have heard, but allow the good seed to be stifled in your heart by the thorns of worldly cares and desires; in that case, to use the comparison of the Apostle St. James, you will be like to one who beheld his face in the mirror, and went his way, and forgot how he looked (James i. 23, 24). In vain will be all preaching for you, if you imitate the idle servant, who listens submissively to what his master tells him, but goes and does the contrary. If you would reap fruit from the word of God, put no obstacle in its way, but see that the good seed is planted in the fruitful soil of a well-disposed heart; foster and water it with care; then it will bring forth fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold, unto life everlasting.

The preaching of the Church, as I have shown you, is of the same excellence, the same necessity for us, the same power and efficacy, as the word of Christ. Should not this fact inspire you, beloved brethren, with an ardent desire, a true hunger and thirst for this spiritual nutriment of the soul? Should it not be a powerful incentive to you, according to the example of the pious people who followed Our Lord by thousands to listen to His divine word, with eagerness to gather around the pulpit of the church to hear this same divine message which Jesus Christ Himself, by the mouth of His minister, condescends to deliver you? As you desire the well-being of your souls, then, beloved brethren, do not, by your own fault, absent yourselves from the preaching of the word of God. Endeavor, by all means, to be present at the

sermons on Sundays and festivals, and on particular occasions, such as the forty hours, and the holy season of Lent, when special sermons are preached in this church. Thus you will make yourselves worthy of the good reputation you enjoy as members of this congregation; and, what is of still greater importance, you will secure the success of the work of your salvation, and walk with unfaltering steps on the narrow and arduous path that leads to eternal happiness. Amen.

Quinquagesima Sunday.

DANGEROUS READING.

"When Jesus drew nigh to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way-side, begging."—Luke xviii. 35.

THIS blind man, who was so sensible of his miserable condition, and so anxious to be relieved from it, teaches us how eagerly we should guard against another, more lamentable, species of blindness—spiritual blindness. By spiritual blindness I understand a state of mind in which a man, forgetful of his last end, is so wholly engrossed in earthly concerns, that he loses sight of the truths of his faith, and, reckless of all consequences, continues to lead a life of sin. This is a very sad and dangerous condition, against which no one who is concerned for his salvation can be sufficiently on his guard. This doleful state may be brought on by various causes, but of all those causes there is, as experience proves, none so infallible in its baleful results as *dangerous reading*. Therefore I propose, to-day, to speak a word of warning to you against this prolific source of spiritual blindness. Whatever plea may be urged in favor of free and indiscriminate reading, I do not hesitate to pronounce it in the highest degree immoral, injurious, and unjustifiable. I shall, accordingly, show you that it is—

1. *Unlawful;* 2. *Pernicious;* 3. *Inexcusable.*

1. UNLAWFUL.

By dangerous reading we understand such as entails danger to faith and morals; and such reading must be pronounced unlawful.

1. First of all, I say, it is unlawful *in itself*, because

it is sinful. For, it is certainly sinful wilfully, and without any justifying grounds, to call forth thoughts and representations which offend against faith and morality. But whoever reads such books as described is guilty of this sin; for he who reads must think of what he reads, and if what he reads is directed against faith or sound morals, his thoughts will be directed in the same way. He is, therefore, guilty of voluntarily arousing within himself thoughts against faith and morals. But is that not in itself a sin?

But the reader of bad books or papers not only arouses sinful thoughts within himself; he also *dwells wilfully* on those sinful thoughts. For, as such books or papers commonly contain, not only occasional thoughts against faith and morals, but are often teeming with infidelity and immorality, no one can continue to read them without fostering an unbroken series of infidel and immoral thoughts, which, certainly, is nothing else than wilfully dwelling on sinful thoughts. And who will say that that is not sinful?

Moreover, it is sinful without necessity to expose one's self to the proximate occasion of grievous sin. That is in itself a grievous sin, even though one may not commit the sin to which one exposes himself; for he who puts himself in the proximate occasion without necessity loves the danger, and, consequently, the sin itself, which of itself is a mortal sin. But such dangerous reading is, manifestly, a proximate occasion of grievous sin. For, as I have already shown, during such reading sinful thoughts and representations naturally arise, which are freely indulged, especially if the reading is prolonged. Is it not plain, then, that such reading is a proximate occasion to sinful thoughts, desires, words, and deeds? Will a man or woman, who is naturally weak and inclined to evil, withstand

the influence of such reading? That were more than human; and, therefore, he who without necessity thrusts himself into the danger is already guilty of all the sins that are liable to follow. The reading of bad books or papers, whether against faith or morals, is, therefore, unlawful, because it is sinful in itself.

2. But dangerous reading is unlawful, in the second place, because it violates *the laws of the Church.* The Church, who has received from her Divine Founder the charge to preserve His doctrine pure and free from errors, has always forbidden the reading of such books as attack or misrepresent the divine teaching. Thus the Apostle induced the Christians of Ephesus, not only to abandon the reading of such books, but also to surrender the books themselves, and publicly to consign them to the flames. (Acts xvii. 19.) The Church, at all times, followed this example of the Apostle. The Council of Trent, particularly, has given its attention to this matter. It caused a catalogue, called the Index, to be drawn up, in which dangerous books, either according to classes or singly, are inscribed, and their reading or retention prohibited, under pain of grievous sin, and, in some cases, even under the severest ecclesiastical censures. This Index was published by Pope Pius IV., and enlarged and strictly enforced by his successors. It is, therefore, unlawful to read bad books, both because it is sinful in itself, and because it is expressly forbidden by the Church. Should that alone not suffice to make you abstain from such reading? But it is more than unlawful and sinful; it is most pernicious in its effects.

II. PERNICIOUS.

1. With regard to those books which are *against faith*, they are well calculated gradually to undermine

the faith of even those readers who are tolerably instructed and educated. For, by such reading, religious sentiment and love for the faith are extinguished by degrees. Indifference, which leads to the neglect of prayer and the sacraments, takes their place. The repeated attacks on the faith, made now openly, now covertly, begin to exert their influence, and to awaken doubts in the mind. As faith is already weakened, doubt follows doubt without resistance, and soon faith is gone to make room for infidelity. It is an acknowledged fact, beloved brethren, that infidelity is chiefly the fruit of a godless and impious press, and of the wicked and blasphemous publications which, in every civilized language, inundate the world. But if such reading deprives even educated people of their faith, how much more dangerous is it for the simple, unsuspecting, uneducated Christian, who is by no means prepared to meet such assaults.

No one will deny the fact that it is most dangerous without necessity to frequent the *society of infidels.* Whoever does so, as experience shows, is likely soon to suffer shipwreck in the faith. But the writings of infidels are generally much more dangerous than their conversation. In conversation one may easily detect the cause of their infidelity. Their vices and libertinism may come to light and serve as an antidote against the influence of their speeches. In their writings the case is different. Here their persons and their vices disappear behind the scene. Their works are often written with spirit and ability, so as to pre-occupy the reader in favor of the author. Besides, the poison is not to be detected at once, but is dealt out gradually, in small doses, and well sweetened, so as to be imbibed unconsciously. One has full time to reflect on what he has read, gets used to the poisonous beverage, and thus

the deadly mixture penetrates ever deeper and deeper into the soul. Therefore a well-known infidel said in reference to the French Revolution and its inhuman atrocities: "Books have done all that."

2. And now, what shall I say of *immoral* books and papers? Beloved brethren, such books and papers are, owing to the weakness and corruption of the human heart, still more dangerous than the former. And here I will not speak of the grosser sort of immoral publications, but those that wear a more innocent garb, and go under the name of light reading, and works of fiction; which, while in expression they keep within the bounds of morality, and put on a certain show of external decency, by sentimentality, sensationalism, exciting plots and descriptions, arouse the passions and fill the imagination with dangerous representations. Such are the great bulk of our modern novels, or story-books; and these, I say, are ruinous.

Why? First, because they directly appeal to, and arouse the sensual passion of love, which is the most dangerous and uncontrollable of all human passions. Secondly, because they surround vice with all the graces which beautiful style can bestow, and thus represent it as something desirable and amiable. Thirdly, because they divest vice, not only of its ugliness, but also of its sinfulness, and thus set it up for the admiration and imitation of the reader. How often do we not find impurity, and the worst kind of it, adultery, glorified as something praiseworthy, noble, and even holy? Therefore Jean Jacques Rousseau, himself a novel-writer of this description, says: "A chaste young woman has never read a novel." Though this assertion in its generality may be somewhat exaggerated, yet it remains true that the habitual novel-reader does not possess a clean heart.

Now, if the less immoral class of books and papers, the so-called light literature, which wears, at least, the external garb of decency, is so ruinous in its effects, how destructive must those publications be, which are immoral in expression as well as in matter, which *openly teach* and preach immorality! And yet such publications are printed, sold, given from hand to hand, circulated even among young women and children! Oh, for shame! Do you not blush to read such a book? What must one think of a woman, young or old, in whose hand such a book or paper has been seen? What of the house, or family, in which such books or papers are kept, and are accessible to all! From the quality of the mental food we may conclude to the quality of the inmates of such a house.

Such are the murderous effects of bad reading. It is, therefore, not only unlawful, but most baneful in its effects. Yet those who are addicted to this kind of reading seek excuses to justify themselves, and set their conscience at ease; but I further maintain that there is no excuse.

III. INEXCUSABLE.

There are Christians who realize and admit all I have said against dangerous reading, yet continue to read with some appearance of good faith. They say, all that has been said upon the matter is most true, taken in its generality, but has no reference to them individually. If you take them to task for their free and indiscriminate reading, they will answer:

1. "Such books and papers may be very dangerous to certain characters; but, *for my own part*, they do not entail the slightest danger for me, as I know from experience; for I have read many such works without the slightest harm." You say you have experienced

no harm from such reading! Did you ever reflect upon the cause? A dead body experiences no injury. May your soul not be like to a corpse? May you not be spiritually dead? If such is the case, will your bad books restore to you the life of the soul? Do you not see, then, the necessity of reading good books?

Or, is it that you do not understand what you read? If so, why such waste of time? Or are you, perhaps, of such an angelic nature, that such things do not affect you? Would that it were so! But do angels love to wallow in mud? It may be that you have not yet experienced any harm; but beware; the harm will come; and then it will be too late to take precaution!

2. Another will say: "I take no pleasure in what is offensive in such books or papers; I pass over it lightly; in fact, I read such things only *for my education* and improvement." Your intention, the end you have in view, is laudable. But does the end justify the means? May we do evil that good may come? Now, what is it you would improve in? Would you have a better and more thorough knowledge of your faith and religion? Or do you seek moral improvement? And to acquire a thorough knowledge of your religion you read works which misrepresent your faith and religion, and drag them into the very dirt! And to improve morally you read books teeming with the grossest immorality! You read the novel to educate and form the heart! O my dear friend, the general run of novels form not, but deform and pervert the heart; they form fools, cranks, and oddities, but not true human and Christian characters.

The poor novel-reading *young woman* is the most piteous creature on earth, having her heart full of perverse sentiment, and her head filled with a chaos of false ideas; thus she is educated for the lunatic asylum

rather than for life. She has a sigh and a tear for the hero and heroine of her favorite story, but not a sigh or a tear of sympathy for the sufferings of Jesus Christ, her Lord, who shed His blood for her. What a model of a tender and sympathetic heart! Those furies in the shape of women, who, during the French Revolution, murdered the priests on the public streets, and tore their still palpitating hearts from their bosoms, were notorious novel-readers!

But if you will learn language, improve in style, I ask, are there not good books enough for that purpose? Have you read the whole catalogue of good books? When you have done so, you will require little more aid towards a good style, and may take to the reading of some more solid matter than the novel or story-paper.

3. But you will say: "*Good taste* requires that we read such matters; one who is not well read in all fields of literature makes rather a sorry figure in society." Is it necessary that you should move in that society in which such topics are discussed? Suppose circumstances demand that you frequent such society; your ignorance would be nothing to be ashamed of, but rather an honor to you; here ignorance is bliss. There is nothing so honorable for a young woman as innocence and ignorance of all that could tarnish the holy virtue of purity. You know that very well; and therefore you are ashamed to be seen with a bad book in your hand, and withdraw from the eyes of men, and seek secret nooks and corners to indulge your sinful curiosity—unless, perchance, you have lost all sense of shame. For the rest, a sufficient knowledge of such books, and a great deal more notice than they deserve, will be found in the literary reviews, which more than suffice for society purposes.

If a book deserves no notice in a decent literary magazine, it is no shame to be ignorant of its existence and its character.

4. You may say: "I read such publications for *amusement* and pastime." My dear friend, this is the weakest and most self-condemning of all your excuses. You read for amusement and pastime! Therefore you find pleasure in such books; you love the smut which they contain! Such mental nutriment is congenial to you! Then, where are Christian delicacy and modesty? Are they fled to brutish beasts? Or are you degraded beneath the dumb animals?

Let us conclude. It stands certain that bad books and papers, whether against faith or morals, are ruinous. They lead to loss of faith and moral ruin, and are therefore forbidden, both by the natural law and the positive law of the Church. He who, without a grave reason, reads such books is guilty of a grievous sin. Printers cannot print them, nor publishers circulate them, nor librarians give them out, without restriction and discrimination. If they do so, they likewise make themselves guilty of a grievous sin. But you, parents, in particular, are strictly bound to control the reading of your children. You must never allow a book to come into their hands, without having assured yourselves that it contains nothing dangerous to their faith or innocence.

And what I have said of books is true also of *newspapers*, which often print articles in which faith or morality is openly or covertly attacked, and in which all manner of scandal is unblushingly retailed. It were sad, indeed, if in this congregation there were such, particularly Catholic parents, who kept and pecuniarily supported such pernicious papers. Would you patronize a merchant who would supply your fam-

ily with adulterated, not to say poisoned, food; who would heap all manner of insult on the venerated head of your own mother? Do not the publishers of such newspapers supply your family with poisoned victuals? Do they not lift their hand against our holy mother, the Church? And you, the father of a Catholic family, should not only look on with indifference, but even pay your money for such an outrage?

Whoever keeps such a paper, let him ask himself seriously whether, in his circumstances, he is justified in doing so. If he cannot solve his doubt, let him ask his confessor. But should any of you, beloved brethren, have bad books in his keeping, let him go this very day to his book-shelves and take them out, and, despite their beautiful covers, mercilessly consign them to the flames, according to the example of the Christians of Ephesus, who, at the exhortation of the Apostle, brought together their superstitious books, to the value of 50,000 pieces of silver, and cast them into the fire. And in future procure for yourselves and your children good Catholic books and papers. Thus you will have healthy intellectual and spiritual nourishment for yourselves and your household, secure the faith and innocence of your children, and reap the blessing of God as your reward. Amen.

First Sunday in Lent.

TEMPTATIONS.

"Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil."—Matt. iv. 1.

In the gospel of to-day our blessed Lord shows us how we should behave in temptations, and gives us many excellent lessons on the subject. For to-day, however, I shall select only two of these, which are contained in the text which I have quoted to you: "Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil." For, as Our Saviour retired into the desert only at the inspiration of the spirit of God, there to be tempted, it follows that we should not, of our own free will and without necessity, expose ourselves to temptations. But when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, we are told, the tempter came. In this fact we find the hint that, in the temptations into which we fall without our doing, we should not rely on the grace of God alone, but, according to the example of our blessed Lord, co-operate with God's grace. These two lessons are of the utmost importance. If we would follow them faithfully we would not so easily yield to temptations and endanger our eternal salvation. We shall, therefore, in the present discourse consider—

1. *Why we should not expose ourselves to wilful temptations;*

2. *How we should behave in unwilful temptations.*

I. WILFUL TEMPTATIONS.

Why should we not expose ourselves to temptations without necessity? The answer is plain: because, if we wilfully expose ourselves, we may very easily fall into sin. For, to overcome temptation in a salutary manner and to preserve ourselves free from sin, the assistance of God's grace is absolutely necessary. But we cannot count on this supernatural assistance in those temptations which we seek of our own free will.

1. I say that in order to overcome a temptation in a salutary manner, *grace is absolutely necessary.* Human will of itself, without the aid of grace, is unfit to obtain the victory. Such is the teaching of the Church. But by victory is understood here, of course, that mastery of which the Apostle speaks, the victory of him "that striveth lawfully" (II. Tim. ii. 5), the victory that is pleasing to God, and is a step in the path of our salvation; for, if one overcomes one temptation by another, or one sin or vice by another; if one overcomes the desire of revenge by avarice, and avarice by intemperance, and intemperance by sinful ambition, such victories are neither salutary nor meritorious, and may be achieved without the aid of supernatural grace. But to overcome those same temptations for God's sake, and in a manner pleasing to God, is the victory of grace and of faith, according to the words of the Apostle St. John: "This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith" (I. John v. 4). It remains certain, therefore, that without the grace of God we cannot overcome temptations in a manner pleasing to God.

2. I further maintain that in wilful temptations we *cannot count on* the assistance of God's *grace*, at least with any degree of security, because, in such a case, we do not avoid the occasion of sin. And, first of all,

a man has no reason to hope for the assistance of God's grace, to overcome those temptations into which he wilfully thrusts himself. For, on what grounds could he hope, in this case? Is it that God is in duty bound to tender him His assistance? If that were so, grace, as the Apostle tells us, would no longer be grace, that is, a free and gratuitous gift, but a debt that God owed us. Or is it that God has promised him His assistance, and is bound by His fidelity to aid him? God has never made such a promise. Or is it because God is infinitely merciful? But, as long as one wilfully seeks the occasion of sin, he puts an obstacle in the way of the mercy of God, by making himself utterly unworthy of it, and incapable of receiving it. The man who wilfully exposes himself to temptation and will not avoid the occasion of sin has, therefore, no reason to hope for the assistance of God to overcome temptation. On the contrary, he has every reason to fear that God will withhold His grace from him, and that he will succumb and fall into sin. Why? Because God has expressly said that He will allow those to fall who rashly expose themselves to the danger: "He that loveth danger," He says, "shall perish in it" (Ecclus. iii. 27).

3. And *why* does God, in this case, *withhold His grace* from us? It is, as Tertullian says, that His grace may *not be profaned.* Else God's grace would be made the instrument of our levity and pride. For, if we could rely upon the assistance of grace, when we rashly expose ourselves to temptation, then we would take no precautions, but recklessly expose ourselves to every danger, according to the bent of our inclinations. But such behavior would be the greatest levity and pride, arising from our overweening confidence in God's assistance, which would be a manifest profanation of God's grace.

Besides, Almighty God, in this case, withholds His grace from us to *punish our presumption.* For, when we expose ourselves to temptation without necessity, we make ourselves guilty of the greatest temerity, because we *tempt God;* and that we do in three different ways.

First, we tempt God's infinite *power,* by expecting Him, without cause, to work a miracle in our favor. For, when a man expects of God that He should sustain him in temptation, while he himself does nothing towards his own preservation, he demands of Him something which is in direct contradiction with the ordinary laws of the distribution of divine grace. For the laws of grace demand co-operation on the part of man. He who wilfully thrusts himself into the temptation, presuming on God's grace, therefore, demands of God a true miracle of grace, a suspension of the ordinary laws of His grace in his favor. He therefore tempts God's omnipotence by his presumption. Need he wonder, then, that God chastises him by allowing him to fall into sin?

He tempts God, moreover, in regard to His infinite *mercy.* For the mercy by which God gives to man the necessary strength to overcome temptations, according to St. Augustine, is extended only to those who, without their own doing, fall into temptations. Now, he who brings on his own temptations expects that God should show him the same mercy which He has reserved for those who are tempted against their will and without their doing. He expects that God should draw the limits of His mercy according to his dictation, in order to bring him within its compass. Is that not presumption on God's mercy?

Lastly, the man who wilfully exposes himself to the temptation tempts the eternal *truthfulness* of God by

downright *hyprocrisy*. For he invokes the assistance of God against a danger into which he deliberately thrusts himself; calls upon the aid of God to overcome a sin which he does not wish to avoid. Is that not downright hypocrisy? May God not justly answer him, as Jesus Christ answered the Pharisees: "Why do you tempt Me, ye hypocrites?" (Matt. xxii. 18.)

Hence it is manifest that those who, without necessity, expose themselves to temptation, have no grounds to hope for the effectual assistance of God's grace, but have every cause to fear that He will abandon them to their own weakness and to the power of their enemy. Now, judge for yourselves, beloved brethren, whether the confessor may give absolution to such obstinate sinners. And yet, how many there are in our days who live in this lamentable state! How many drunkards there are who will not avoid the occasion, who will not keep out of the drinking-houses! How many cursers and blasphemers there are who will not shun the occasion of their impious vice, who will not give up their habit of gambling! How many slaves of impurity and adultery there are who will not flee the danger, who will not give up their companionships, their company-keeping, their immodest dances, and solitary and nightly meetings! All those are themselves to blame, if they succumb, as succumb they will, in the temptations which they themselves have courted. First, they must avoid the proximate occasion; then, and not till then, may they trust that God will not abandon them to their own weakness and to the craft of the devil. How you have to behave, when, without your doing, you come into temptation, it remains for me, in the second place, briefly to explain.

II. UNWILFUL TEMPTATIONS.

In those temptations which come upon us without our doing, Almighty God never fails to give us the necessary grace to overcome them. But, unless we co-operate with this grace, it remains fruitless, and we fall into sin notwithstanding. Therefore, in such temptations we must *co-operate with the grace* God so liberally extends to us. But how are we to do this?

1. We must use those graces to *combat* against ourselves and our evil inclinations, for it is the will of God that we should make that use of His graces which is in accordance with our condition and with the purpose for which the graces are given. But what is our condition in this life? It is, as the Scripture teaches us, a warfare. As Christians we are soldiers of Jesus Christ, and therefore it is our task to wage a continual warfare against ourselves and our immoderate passions. If, then, we would use God's graces according to our condition as Christians, and according to His holy intent, we must employ them for this spiritual combat.

And this use of God's grace is altogether in accordance with the *purpose* for which it is given, which is none else than to strengthen us in the combat against the temptations under which we labor. In our present state God gives us, not the grace of peace and immunity from temptation, as He gave to our first parents in Paradise, but the grace of victoriously combating against the enemies of our salvation. Such is the grace we stand in need of in our fallen state. For, the temptations to which we are continually exposed are as many assaults of the enemy, which we have to ward off by resistance and combat; and grace is given us to strengthen us in this conflict. If, then, we do not use the grace of God for this end, namely, by its aid to struggle against temptations, we neglect to employ

it for the purpose for which it has been given, forgetful of the words of our blessed Lord: "I came not to send peace, but the sword" (Matt. x. 34); forgetful that heaven is the place of rest and peace, but earth is the field of battle.

Yet open combat alone is not sufficient; we must also use prudent *tactics* against so crafty an enemy. We must endeavor to tire and weaken him. Who is the enemy that presses hardest upon us in this struggle? It is, as the Apostle tells us, our own flesh, which is the slave of sensual appetites, and which is in continual rebellion against the law of reason and the law of God. This enemy is very powerful and dangerous, because he is so near to us, and forms part of us; because we naturally sympathize with him, and he moves against us not at once with open violence, but with wiles and treachery. If, then, the grace of God should lead us to victory, we must, according to the example of Our Lord, endeavor to deny, to weaken, and subdue the cravings of the flesh. A Christian who does not use these tactics in the spiritual combat, but indulges the flesh with all comforts, pleasures, and luxuries, flattering himself that the grace of God alone will save him, sadly deceives himself. For the grace of God, as St. Bernard tells us, begins its work by stimulating man to the mortification of the flesh and the suppression of its evil desires. As long as we do not attend to this first and chief impulse of grace, as long as we do not mortify the flesh, we cannot count on the effectual aid of divine grace.

Do not, then, beloved brethren, neglect the practice of Christian mortification, especially during the holy season of Lent. If mortification is necessary at all times, it is doubly so at this time, when the Church by her commandment makes it a strict duty. What

moves the Church to do so is her motherly care for our salvation. Knowing our weakness, and the necessity of the mortification of the flesh, and our repugnance against this necessary means of salvation, she enforced it by a strict law during this holy season, in order to exercise us in this necessary warfare against the flesh. Let us, then, enter upon this season of penance and mortification in the spirit of the Church. Faithfully observe the fasting of the Church; thus you will obtain the triumph over the flesh; you will be victorious over your temptations in this life of combat, and lay up imperishable treasures for the life of everlasting rest and peace. Amen.

Second Sunday in Lent.

HEAVEN.

"Lord, it is good for us to be here."—Matt. xvii. 4.

THE transfiguration of Our Lord, which is the subject of to-day's gospel, had for its end particularly to animate and strengthen the apostles for the great trials which awaited them. It gave, as it were, a foretaste of the happiness that was in store for them if they faithfully persevered in the following of Jesus Christ. We, too, beloved brethren, are exposed to many trials, and afflictions, and temptations of every description, and are no less in need of encouragement on the path of salvation. And this comfort we find in the consideration of that happiness which will be the reward of our perseverance in the service of God. We shall, therefore, to-day make the joys of heaven the subject of our consideration, and try, as far as is given to us, to realize the greatness of that happiness, which will crown our victorious struggle in this vale of combat. This happiness is a perfect bliss, which excludes all evil and includes all good; and under these two aspects we shall consider it—

1. *As the exclusion of all evil;*
2. *As the possession of all good.*

I. THE EXCLUSION OF ALL EVIL.

1. The bliss to be free from all evil is, indeed, an extraordinary one; it is not so great, however, that we cannot form some idea of it. We may realize it,

to some extent, if we represent to ourselves the various evils, bodily and mental, with which experience, sad to say, has rendered us but too familiar. With regard to mental evils, or the evils of *the soul*, we need only call to mind the continual and irksome struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the passions that rage within us; the evil thoughts that molest us; the bad desires that torment us; the remorse and anxiety that rack us. And how numberless are the ills to which *the body* is subject! What toils and labors, what sufferings and hardships, what diseases and infirmities are its inheritance! And who can recount all the privations, unforeseen accidents and misfortunes, temporal losses and calamities of every description, which threaten at all moments to bring affliction on our mortal bodies. In fact, our whole earthly life, beloved brethren, is one chain of ills and sufferings, and the last link of the chain is the most dreadful of all—death. Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, would you not reckon yourselves happy beyond measure, if you were free from all those evils?

Well, that is the happiness which is promised us, my brethren. To this happiness we confidently look forward; for all hardships and afflictions *are excluded* from the mansions of the blessed in heaven. Of this the Holy Ghost assures us in the Book of Revelations with the words, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more; nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away" (Apoc. xxi. 4). There, nothing shall disturb us, nothing molest us—neither want, nor fear, nor any unsatisfied longing. If the happiness of heaven consisted in nothing else, would it not be worthy of all our exertions and our unceasing efforts? If there was a land whose climate

possessed such wonderful qualities as at once to banish all sickness and disease, and secure its inhabitants a thousand years of happy and painless life, would we not envy its denizens, and joyfully undergo the hardships of a toilsome journey, to become part of its blissful population? We would shrink neither from fatigue nor expense. The rich would gladly, if necessary, sacrifice their possessions; kings would renounce their crowns and sceptres, to become the citizens of such a wonder-land. What sacrifices, then, should we not make to be freed, not only from sickness and death, but also from all other evils; not only for a thousand years, but for the endless duration of eternity! And yet, beloved brethren, this is but the least portion of the happiness of heaven, which consists not only in the exclusion of all evil, but also in—

II. THE POSSESSION OF ALL GOOD.

Though I venture to speak to you on the bliss which consists in the possession of all good, it is not my intention to give you an adequate description of it; for this is simply impossible, as we have no adequate conception of heavenly goods. And though God should give me a similar privilege to that he once gave to St. Paul, who was rapt to the third heaven, yet words should fail me to describe what God would reveal. It, therefore, remains for me only to follow the illustrations of Holy Scripture, and, by comparison with finite earthly happiness, to try to convey an approximate and very imperfect idea of the infinite happiness of heaven. And as this happiness consists in material as well as spiritual goods, suited to the nature of man, who consists of body and soul, I shall first speak of the *material*, or bodily, and then of the immaterial or *spiritual* goods of the infinite bliss of heaven.

1. The first of these *material* goods, enjoyed by the blessed in heaven, is the *place of their abode.* St. John, in the Apocalypse, gives the following pen-picture of the City of God, the heavenly Jerusalem: "The building of the wall thereof was of jasper-stone; but the city itself pure gold, like to clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls; and the street of the city was of pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (Apoc. xxi. 18 seq.). Must we thus imagine the abode of the blessed? Not so, my dear brethren; this was not the intention of the sacred writer. He knew very well how far this picture fell short of the reality; he only wished to impress upon us, that, if this picture, which the blessed in heaven would not consider worthy of their regard, now suffices to arouse our admiration, our wonderment shall know no bounds, when once we shall have the good fortune to behold the City of God in its reality.

The second material, or visible good, which the blessed enjoy, is the holy and amiable *society* of the elect of God, the society of the saints, who love one another so tenderly and intensely, that each takes part in the happiness of all the rest, and the bliss of all becomes, as it were, the bliss of each. There are, it is true, in heaven different degrees of happiness, corresponding to the different degrees of merit and glory. But as the measure of each is full, and all are perfectly resigned to the will of God, there is among the blessed no jealousy or discontent. Those that enjoy an inferior degree of glory rejoice at the greater glory of their betters, as if the bliss and glory of those were their own; and they praise and glorify God for having bestowed on those that higher grade of heavenly bliss

of which they themselves are incapable. Each is so satisfied with his own place in the celestial ranks, that he has no desire to be promoted to a higher. They are, as it were, one heart and one soul. What a happiness to live forever in such society!

The third bodily good which the blessed will enjoy after the Resurrection, is the perfect *likeness of their bodies with the glorified body of Christ*, who, as the Apostle teaches us, "will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory" (Phil. iii. 21). Our bodies will, therefore, after the Resurrection, bear the same wonderful attributes as the glorious body of Christ: the attribute of *impassibility:* being sown in corruption, they shall rise in incorruption (I. Cor. xv. 42); the attribute of *brilliancy:* for, then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. xiii. 43); the attribute of *agility*, in virtue of which they shall be enabled to move with the quickness of spirit instantaneously from one end of the universe to the other: being sown in weakness, they shall rise in power (I. Cor. xv. 43); the attribute of *subtility*, in virtue of which they will be able to penetrate, spirit-like, through all spaces without encountering any obstacle, as our blessed Lord entered the supper-room through the closed doors, and stood in the midst of His apostles: being sown as animal bodies, they shall rise as spiritual bodies (I. Cor. xv. 44). What joy and glory for the soul to be eternally united with the body, thus spiritualized and endowed with such wonderful properties!

And, in addition to all this, the *senses* will be gratified with the purest, and noblest, and holiest pleasures. Such are the visible and sensible goods and delights which await us in eternity. How sad would be our mistake, then, beloved brethren, if we attached our

hearts to the vile and transitory goods and pleasures of this world, and thus deprived ourselves of those inestimable, eternal, and heavenly goods!

2. Yet incomparably greater is that happiness which consists in the possession of the *spiritual* goods, those goods which are peculiarly the portion of the glorified soul. For the essential glory of the blessed consists, not in the pleasures of sense, but in those of the spirit. It consists in the *beatific vision*, whereby the blessed behold God face to face, love Him, and enjoy Him forever. It is the beatific vision, which will satisfy all our faculties and constitute our consummate and unspeakable happiness, according to the words of the Psalmist, "I shall be satisfied, when Thy glory shall appear" (Ps. xvi. 15).

We shall *see God*. Now we know that God is the sum of all perfections, but we do not see Him. In heaven we shall see Him with the eye of the spirit, clearly, directly, and immediately, face to face. And what does it mean to see God face to face? It means to see God as He is, with all His attributes, with all His infinite treasures, goodness, greatness, beauty, and perfection. We shall, therefore, see the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the oneness of substance and the trinity of persons revealed before our minds. And, as in God all truth is contained, we shall read in Him numberless truths, which will satisfy that insatiable thirst for knowledge, which all human learning cannot gratify. At the first glimpse a saint gets of the infinite essence of God, though he were but the last in the ranks of the saints, he knows infinitely more than all the philosophers and divines of this world taken together. "I shall be satisfied, when Thy glory shall appear."

We shall *love God*. For, seeing Him face to face,

we shall know Him as the supreme good, as the fulness and source of all good, as the infinite Goodness and Beauty itself, as the sum total of all that is perfect and amiable; and knowing Him as such, we cannot but love Him with our whole heart, and with our whole soul, and with all our strength. Thus our hearts shall be filled with infinite joy, and all our longing for happiness shall be gratified. "I shall be satisfied, when Thy glory shall appear."

We shall *enjoy God.* For, to behold God face to face, and love Him with all the intensity of our souls, is to enjoy Him in His infinite fulness. Our love will be a love full of pleasure and enjoyment, a love of the sweetest and most intimate union with God, whereby we shall be in a certain true sense transformed into Him, live and have our being in Him, by a new and supernatural life and existence, which is peculiar only to God. As the iron which is cast into the fire, without changing its own nature, is, as it were, transformed into fire, so as not to be distinguishable from it; so the souls of the just, immerged in the ocean of God's love, shall be so united with Him, as to become like to Him, and form one with Him, without ceasing to be His creatures. The infinite wisdom of God is their wisdom; the love of God is their love; the omnipotence of God is their power; the glory of God is their glory; the life of God is their life. In Him they know, and love, and act, and rule, and live. But the crown of all their happiness is the unwavering consciousness that their bliss will last forever.

Such is the happiness to which the love and mercy of God has called us; such is the blissful banquet to which the heavenly Father invites us. God in His omnipotence could not have given us a grander destination, could not have prepared greater glory and

happiness for us. With what joy and gratitude, then, should we accept this divine invitation! With what zeal and fervor should we strive after this eternal happiness! Should not our whole life be directed incessantly to this one great end? Should we not resolutely surmount every obstacle that stands in our path, and look with contempt on all the temptations and allurements which would clog our footsteps or divert our course from this glorious goal, which God in His goodness has fixed for us? What can the world offer us which may be compared with this great glory which God has prepared for us? How great, then, would not be our folly, if we listened to the suggestions of the world, and allowed ourselves to be diverted from our last end! How shameful our ingratitude, if by an unchristian life we thwarted the merciful designs of Almighty God! And yet there are Christians without number who make themselves guilty of this folly and ingratitude. Oh, alas! for the terrible judgment and dreadful eternity that awaits such unworthy followers of Christ! Oh, if these blinded sinners do not, while it is yet time, abandon their sinful lives, what will be their remorse in the flames of hell for all eternity, when they recall the infinite and eternal happiness which they have, by their own fault, irrevocably forfeited!

Beware, then, beloved brethren, of such an unspeakable misfortune, while it is yet time. Keep your eyes continually fixed upon the grand destination for which God has created you; remember, particularly in the moment of temptation, the glorious crown that is promised to him who perseveres to the end. This thought, together with fervent prayer, will sustain you in the most violent temptations; and thus you shall gain that everlasting happiness which is the reward and the crown of God's elect. Amen.

Third Sunday in Lent.

IMPURITY.

"I will return into my house."—Luke xi. 24.

THE house of the unclean spirit is pre-eminently the soul of him who is given to the vice of *impurity*. In such a soul the evil spirit is, as it were, at home. There he is master, goes out and in at pleasure; he is lord, and rules as he pleases. How doleful, then, is the state of the victim of impurity, whose soul is completely in the power of the devil! And how earnest must be your endeavor, beloved brethren, to keep yourselves free from this tyranny of Satan and the slavery of this vice, which brings a man under the absolute rule of the evil one! To arouse you to the detestation of this vice, and to watchfulness against the snares of this tyrant, will be the object of to-day's discourse. And for this end I shall endeavor to show you that the vice of impurity is—

1. *The most detestable of all vices;*
2. *The most destructive of all vices.*

1. THE MOST DETESTABLE.

It is the most detestable of all vices, because it reduces man to a deeper degradation than any other vice.

1. Man, considered in his *human nature*, is the noblest of God's visible creatures, the king of the visible creation. But what gives him his pre-eminence in God's material world is the spiritual soul that is within him, which is endowed with intelligence and free-will. It

is the spirit which dwells in him, that raises man above the brute animal and makes him a human being; it is the spirit, which enables him to ascend from what is visible to what is invisible and spiritual, from what is temporal to what is eternal; it is the spirit, that likens him to God's angels, makes him the image of God Himself. The spirit is, therefore, elevated so high over the material world, as heaven is above earth, as eternity is above time; and, consequently, there is no deeper degradation than to make this noble spirit, which God has breathed into our being, the slave of the body and its sensual appetites. It is like making the heir of the throne the slave of the most abject of his subjects. And this is the degradation of the votary of lust. In him the sensual appetite rules; the spirit is the slave of the body. His understanding is enlisted in the service of sensuality, to find out ways and means to gratify his beastly lusts; his free-will is sold into the slavery of his passions. His intellect and will, therefore, are the willing bondmen, the obedient tools, of his bestial instincts. Is not that the most abject servitude, the deepest degradation?

Thus impurity lowers man to the *level of the beast*. For, as the brute beast follows the impulse of his sensual instinct, so, also, the impure man or woman; as the brute beast lives and moves within the realm of sense, so also the impure man; as the brute beast seeks no other pleasure but what is merely sensual, so also the victim of impurity. Therefore, a Father of the Church says: "Pride is the sin of angels; avarice is the sin of man; but sensuality is the peculiar property of the beast."

Nay, he who indulges in this vice lowers himself *beneath the beast*. For, in the brute animal, which is not endowed with reason, this rule of sensuality is in the

order of nature; the beast has no other guide than his sensual appetites; but in man, who is endowed by the Creator with reason to moderate his carnal appetites, sensual indulgence is the most abject slavery. Impurity, therefore, deforms and degrades man; and, by deforming man, it deforms the entire work of God's visible creation, of which, according to the intention of the Creator, he is the head and centre; for, what deforms the head disfigures the whole work of the artist. The slave of impurity is, therefore, not only a monster in himself, but an ignominious blemish upon the divine work of God's creation.

No wonder, then, that *God detests* this vice above all others. Hear how the Holy Scripture gives expression to God's detestation of this vice: "It repented Him that He had made man on the earth. And being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. My spirit shall not remain in man forever" (Gen. vi. 6, 7, 3). And why? "Because he is flesh," because he is sensual, impure, given to the lusts of the flesh. Yea, the hatred of God against this vice is so great, that it does not confine itself to impure man alone, but extends to all that comes in contact with him. "From man," He adds, "even to beasts, from the creeping things even to the fowls of the air, it repenteth Me that I have made them (Ibid. 7). And Almighty God did not confine Himself to mere threats to express His abomination of this hideous vice. An evidence of this is the Deluge, which swept man and beast from the face of the earth; an evidence is the destruction of the impious cities of Sodom and Gomorrha; an evidence is the unnatural Onan, whom God slew with His own hand; an evidence are the many who are daily carried off by an

early and untimely death. Or do you think that it is according to the intention of God that more than one half of our race should be borne off by a premature death? No, beloved brethren; the chief cause of this sad fact is the vice of impurity. Of the "bloody and deceitful" it is written that they "shall not live out half their days" (Ps. liv. 24). The same may be said, with greater reason, of the impure.

2. Thus far we have considered man only according to his human nature; but, besides being rational creatures, we are also *Christians*, redeemed by Jesus Christ; His brothers, the members of His mystic body. In His Incarnation He took to Himself our human nature, and thus made us partakers of His own divine nature, so that we can truly say that we are of royal blood, of divine lineage. By baptism we enter into the household of Jesus Christ, and become His brothers. By holy Communion our union with Him becomes closer still, so that the Apostle could truly say: "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ?" (I. Cor. vi. 15.) If, then, the Jews, who defiled the divine visage of Jesus Christ with mud and spittle, are justly considered guilty of the most sacrilegious crime, how great is the outrage of the Christian who abuses the members of Jesus Christ by sins which we dare not even name, and which we even blush to think of! But in this our intimate union with Jesus Christ, and our participation of His merits, and the inheritance of His kingdom, consists essentially the work of our Redemption. To indulge in the vice of impurity, therefore, means nothing less than to undo the work of Redemption, and transform it into a work of reprobation. Do you perceive, then, beloved brethren, in what abomination Jesus Christ, the Son of God, must hold the vice of impurity?

3. As Christians we are, further, *temples of the Holy Ghost*, who, in the sanctification of our souls, has taken up His abode within us, diffused the charity of God in our hearts, and espoused to Himself our souls. "Know you not," says the Apostle, "that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I. Cor. iii. 16.) The sin of impurity defiles this consecrated temple of the Holy Ghost. What a dreadful sin, then, is that of impurity, which makes this temple of sanctity the haunt of uncleanness! What a terrible profanation, if the consecrated house of God, sanctified by the divine presence, were changed into a house of prostitution; if, where stood the altar of the living God, incense were burned before a vile prostitute! What degrading idolatry, if, in the sanctuary of God's temple, the knee were bowed to the deity of lust, instead of the God of sanctity! And this is precisely what the votary of impurity does. Cast a glance into the polluted sanctuary of his depraved heart, as the prophet Ezechiel once looked through the gaping crevices of the desecrated sanctuary of the Jewish temple. What do you behold there? What the Prophet beheld: "Every form of creeping things, and of living creatures, the abomination, and all the idols of the house of Israel" (Ezech. viii. 10). His impure thoughts are the poisonous serpents, and his unclean desires are the creeping vermin; and the filthy representations that fill his imagination are the idols set up in the sanctuary of the Holy Ghost; and in the very midst of the sanctuary is the throne of the goddess of uncleanness. And to these idols he burns the incense of his affection! Is not that downright idolatry? Thus the temple of the Holy Ghost is transformed into a foul den of abomination! The Holy Ghost makes room for a legion of demons!

Impurity, therefore, completely demolishes the work of the Holy Trinity in the soul. It demolishes the work of the Father, the work of Creation; it demolishes the work of the Son, the work of Redemption; it demolishes the work of the Holy Ghost, the work of Sanctification. It makes the abode of the Holy Trinity a pandemonium of evil spirits, the house of God a very hell. Do we exaggerate, then, in calling it the most abominable of all vices? But it is, further—

II. THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE.

Here, beloved brethren, I shall confine myself to the disastrous effects which this abominable vice produces in the soul. These are far more baneful than even the most direful effects of all other vices.

1. And first, I say, it transforms the soul into the very *image of hell*. All that goes to compose the most dreadful features of hell is to be found in the degraded soul of the victim of impurity: darkness, disorder, slavery, remorse. There dense *darkness*, the blindness of the understanding, reigns supreme. The intellect of the impure is continually clouded with the poisonous mists that ascend, ever and anon, from his depraved affections. Hence the degraded victim becomes stolid. Nothing makes an impression upon him. In vain do you represent to him the danger which threatens his health, his reputation, his fortune, his domestic happiness. Not even the dreadful eternal truths of our religion: death, judgment, hell, eternity, will leave an impression upon him. What a cloud of impenetrable darkness hovers over his soul!

But the *disorder* of his soul inspires no less horror. There we see all the passions raging in wild confusion. Pride, extravagance, dishonesty, jealousy, hatred, revenge, in short, all immoderate passions, are rev-

elling in one confused maze in the service of impurity.

And if there is an abject *slavery* upon earth, it is that of the slave of impurity. Insatiable sits the voracious monster in his heart, and, with gaping jaws, ever howls for its prey. Ever "more! more!" it cries, and never says, "it is enough!" until the victim sinks exhausted under its tyranny, and not one breath of energy remains to him. A shameful and degrading slavery!

Finally, he becomes a prey to the bitterest *remorse.* No sooner has he given loose rein to his passions, and indulged in the pleasures of this vice, than he sees before him his wrathful judge, ready to pronounce sentence upon him; beneath his feet he sees the abyss of hell open to receive him, and behind him the disgrace that has lowered him below the beast of the field; in short, his heart is filled with confusion and shame, and worried by the pangs of biting remorse.

2. But impurity is not only the image of hell, it is also the *presage and the cause of eternal reprobation.* For, it takes from the motives of conversion all their strength and efficacy. The source from which these motives derive their power is faith, which is the work of the Holy Ghost. Now, this vice drives the Holy Ghost from His temple, from the heart of man, and gradually extinguishes the light of faith in the soul. We need not wonder, then, that the truths of faith fail to have any salutary effect on the heart of him who is addicted to impurity.

Besides, there is no vice which exposes a man to such danger of *relapse* into sin, as the vice of impurity. It becomes a second nature to its victim. Hence it happens, by no means rarely, that such unfortunate persons make the sincere resolve, and promise, on their knees, amid floods of tears, that they will give up this vice, and yet they almost invariably relapse.

Therefore, there is no other sin which exposes a person to the danger of an *unhappy death* as does the sin of lust. For, when the unhappy sinner sees that he is ever and anon relapsing into his sins, he is inclined—such is the blindness with which he is stricken—to defer his conversion indefinitely; and thus it happens that he surrenders himself entirely and without a struggle to the indulgence of his passion, continues to heap sin upon sin, until, at last, a miserable death terminates his wretched existence. O eternity of remorse! O eternity of shame! O eternity of torture! And all that remorse, and shame, and torture, for so momentary, so loathsome, and so degrading a pleasure!

But some one may think, if that is true, there is no salvation for the poor wretch who is addicted to this vice. That would be a false conclusion, beloved brethren; for the vice of impurity has been described not as a fatal, and not as an incurable, but only as a very serious and very dangerous malady. And the danger consists in the fact that, owing to the spiritual blindness which it induces, the unfortunate patient is likely, wholly or in part, to neglect the remedies necessary for his recovery. Whoever you may be, then, my dear friend, though you may have indulged this vice for years, do not despond; for if you earnestly and perseveringly *employ the proper remedies*, your soul will be healed; you will overcome your evil habits and escape the dreadful sentence that hangs over you. And those remedies are expressed by Our Lord in the Gospel in the following two words: "*Watch and pray*" (Mark xiv. 38).

Watch, that is, carefully flee the occasion. In vain would you employ all other means; if you do not avoid the occasion, you will surely fall again. Shun that friend, that companionship, that company-keep-

ing; flee that house, that amusement, that reading; avoid the immoderate use of drink; eschew all persons, places, and things which you know to be an occasion of sin to you. Watch, that is, keep a strict control over your whole person and all your senses; over your hands and feet, over your ears and your tongue, and particularly over your eyes, which are the gates through which death enters the soul. Watch, that is, resist the temptations from the very beginning, from the first instant; do not dally with them!

Pray, pray without ceasing, my dear friend; without prayer it is not possible to guard the angelic virtue of purity; and much less is it possible to regain it, if once lost. Pray, that is, say your daily prayers, night and morning and at meals, regularly and with devotion. Pray, that is, assist regularly at holy Mass. Pray, that is, frequent the sacraments; but most particularly make it a point, if you should have the misfortune to relapse into sin, to go to confession as soon as possible. Pray, that is, have recourse to your holy Mother Mary, the Refuge of sinners, the Mother of beauteous love and holy hope; she will not abandon you in the hour of temptation.

Let us all, then, beloved brethren, faithfully employ those means; and those who have the good fortune to possess the white robe of innocence unstained will bear it with them in all its purity before the judgment-seat of God. And those who have lost this treasure, and even abandoned themselves to the tyranny of that monstrous vice, will burst the bonds that fetter them, regain their innocence, and with it the true peace of heart and the joyous hope of never-ending happiness. Amen.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

CHRISTIAN MORTIFICATION.

"And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw the miracles which He did on them that were diseased."—John vi. 2.

As you have just learned from the words of my text, it was the miracles which Jesus Christ worked that caused the people to follow Him. Since then, however, He has worked much greater and more astonishing miracles; for the conversion of the world to Christianity by twelve fishermen, the resuscitation of countless sinners to the life of grace, the heroic constancy of millions of martyrs, are much greater and more wonderful miracles than those that had been thus far worked by Jesus Christ. Yet there are not a few Christians who refuse to follow Him, and prefer to be numbered among the followers of this world; for they consider the demands made by Jesus Christ upon His followers incomparably stricter than the sacrifices which the world requires of its partisans, and are loud in their complaints of what they consider the excessive severity and uncongenial rigor of the law of Christ. Such complaints, for instance, against the law of fasting and abstinence, all of you may have had occasion to hear. I have reason to think, therefore, that I shall do you a good service to-day, by trying thoroughly to convince you of the mistake of such lukewarm and worldly Christians.

I shall, therefore, show you that their complaints against the severity of the law of Christ are as groundless as they are unjust: (1) *groundless,* because Christ does not require greater abnegation of His followers

than the world requires of its children; (2) *unjust*, because Christ has a greater right to exact sacrifices of us than the world has.

I. THE COMPLAINTS ARE GROUNDLESS.

I said that the complaints against the severity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ are unfounded, because He requires no greater self-abnegation of us than the world does of its followers. To convince you of the truth of this assertion, I shall simply contrast the demands of the Gospel with those of the world. This contrast will enable you to see on which side there is greater leniency and gentleness; on the side of Christ, or on the side of the world.

1. With regard to the *demands of the Gospel* of Jesus Christ, I willingly grant that they are severe. The Gospel requires nothing less of us than the continual struggle against the threefold concupiscence inherent in our nature: against pride, covetousness, and lust. It requires that our life be one of sacrifice and self-abnegation; in short, a life of mortification; for, "they that are Christ's," says St. Paul, "have crucified their flesh with the vices and concupiscences" (Gal. v. 24); and again: "If you live according to the flesh, you shall die; but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live" (Rom. viii. 13). And our blessed Lord Himself says: "If any man will come after Me, let him take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke ix. 23). The demands which the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes upon us are, therefore, truly very great.

But they are *not*, for all that, *exorbitant*. The Gospel of Christ detests exaggerations and extravagances, and takes into account the weakness of human nature. For, however forcibly it condemns avarice and commends poverty, it does not oblige you to renounce

your temporal goods, and to retire to the wilderness or to the seclusion of the cloister. With all its severity, it permits you to retain all that pertains to the convenience and even to the comforts of your state in life. And, however severely it rebukes lust and sensuality, it does not disapprove the married state, but elevates and sanctifies it by the dignity and grace of a special sacrament. In short, the Gospel detests all exaggerated severity, and does not wish that which is only a counsel of perfection to be enforced as a commandment. Nor does it prescribe any penance, but what, as St. Augustine says, is compatible with good health. It also permits, at proper times, rest, recreation, reasonable and becoming amusements, but it wishes these to be sanctified and made spiritually fruitful by a pure intention. Therefore, despite all its severity, the law of Jesus Christ requires nothing which goes beyond the power of frail human nature.

2. Can we say so much for the *demands of the world?* Does not the world make more pressing demands on its followers? How must those who wish to succeed in the world toil, and sweat, and crouch, and crawl? Must they not sacrifice their freedom, and rest, and recreation, and often even their health, at the pleasure of those in whose hands their fortune lies? How many disagreeable circumstances must they encounter from day to day! How many insults have they to brook in silence! To what humiliating slavery are they subjected! Has the Gospel of Christ, has our holy religion, ever laid such a burden upon us, or submitted us to such indignities?

'Tis true, our religion at times imposes *fasting* upon us; but does it not at the same time make an allowance for our infirmities—for age, and labor, and delicate health? But has not the world, too, its fasts? Look

at its slaves—look at the miser, how he fasts, how he famishes, how he counts his money and gluts his eyes over it, while hunger tortures him! See how entire families suffer hunger and abstain from the necessary food, not from want, but from vanity, to procure costly dress, in order to attract the gaze of the public, and to be looked upon as wealthy and respectable!

'Tis true, our religion imposes upon us the duty of *giving alms*—but only from what is superfluous. How does the world treat its followers in this regard? Does it not impose much larger expenses? What expenses are not made on balls, parties, gambling, amusements of all kinds? What sums are spent in dissipation, debauchery, and shameful immoralities?

'Tis true, religion may in some cases demand the sacrifice of our *lives*. We have instances in the millions of martyrs, who, for the glory of their religion, have joyfully shed their blood for Jesus Christ. But does the world not demand infinitely more numerous sacrifices of human life? Who can count the millions who, in the course of centuries, have fallen on bloody fields as the victims of ambition, tyranny, and revolution? Add to these the still greater number of those who have been carried off by the murderous vices of intemperance and impurity; and then judge for yourselves.

What I have said is sufficient to convince you that the demands of the thankless world are, as a rule, much more pressing and exacting than those of the Gospel. How groundless are, therefore, the complaints of severity that are urged against the sweet law of Christ! Let us, further, consider their injustice.

II. THE COMPLAINTS ARE UNJUST.

The complaints of the children of this world against

the severity of the Christian law are, therefore, unjust, because Christ has a greater right than the world to exact from us the sacrifice of self-denial. He has a better title to the sacrifice of our self-abnegation, because self-abnegation is absolutely necessary for our salvation; while the self-denial which the world demands is only calculated to plunge man into utter ruin.

1. The mortification which Christ demands in the Gospel, and which consists chiefly in the renouncement of pleasures and self-abnegation, is absolutely necessary for salvation. Thus He who has opened the gates of heaven for us, who has shown us the way, and is our reliable guide, assures us. "The kingdom of heaven," He says, "suffereth violence; and the violent bear it away" (Matt.. xi 12). And the reason is evident. For, as only the true Christian has a claim to the kingdom of heaven,it is only the true Christian who can obtain eternal salvation. But without mortification *we cannot be true Christians.* Or is he a true Christian who bears no likeness to Jesus Christ, the model of His true followers? Now, what manner of life did Jesus Christ lead in this world? Was it not a life of continued self-abnegation? Does not every step of His earthly career loudly condemn the luxurious and effeminate life of the children of this world? Consider His birth in the most abject poverty, His flight into Egypt, His hidden life, His public preaching, His bitter passion, and His ignominious death! Do you not meet at every stage the most unprecedented instances of self-abnegation? Must not, therefore, our life be a life of self-privation and self-denial, a life of mortification, if we would be true Christians and claim a right to eternal salvation?

If, then, my dear friend, you would know whether you are a true Christian or not, see whether your life is one of self-denial and mortification; see whether

you resist your evil inclinations, and particularly your predominant passion. For, if you allow yourself to be ruled by your passions, if your chief aim in life is to acquire riches and honors, or to indulge the lusts of the flesh, your life is not one of mortification, you have no likeness with Jesus Christ, you are no true Christian, and, therefore, have no claim to the kingdom of heaven.

2. But suppose, what is not the case, that in order to be a true Christian it were not necessary to practise mortification, yet it were impossible without mortification to obtain salvation; for, in order to attain to our last end, it is not sufficient at any given time to be good Christians; we must also *persevere* as such. Only "he that shall persevere to the end shall be saved" (Matt. x. 22). But, owing to the threefold concupiscence and evil inclinations inherent in us, perseverance without mortification is impossible. Do not our depraved inclinations expose us to numberless irksome and grievous temptations? And unless we overcome those temptations, how can we remain true Christians? But to obtain this victory over our temptations, there is need of self-control, self-denial; in short, of the continual practice of mortification. For, how can a Christian who is unpractised in mortification, who is accustomed to shrink from every sacrifice and every difficulty, and to seek nothing but self-gratification, muster so much courage as, under all circumstances, to be able to overcome the most grievous temptations? Such an unmortified, lukewarm Christian will very soon yield to the temptation, and cease to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, a true Christian.

The Apostle St. Paul confirms this teaching, when he tells us that he himself, who had been rapt to the third heaven, found it necessary to practise mortification, in

order to persevere in the friendship of God. "I chastise my body," he says, "and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway" (I. Cor. ix. 27). The Apostle was, therefore, convinced that by pampering our flesh we foster an enemy, who, if treated with indulgence, will arise in rebellion and lord it over the spirit. And is that not the real state of the case?

Does not *experience* teach us the same lesson? We need only recall the degrading idolatry into which the Israelites fell in the desert, the shameful sin of king David, and the sad fall of St. Peter. Have not all those sins been occasioned either by intemperance, or lack of restraint of the eyes, or immoderate curiosity; in other words, by lack of mortification? And does not the very same thing happen among ourselves? Among all those Christians who neglect the duties of their religion, abandon themselves to sin, or even apostatize from the faith, there is hardly one who did not begin by leading an unmortified and sensual life, by neglecting the control of his sensual passions. How thankful should we be, therefore, to our blessed Lord, that He made the practice of self-abnegation, which alone can preserve us from eternal ruin and secure our eternal happiness, an indispensable duty for us!

Now, after we have considered both sides of the question, let me ask you, who has the better right to demand the sacrifice of self-denial from us—Christ, or the world? Christ, who leads the way on the path of mortification and self-abnegation; or the world, that revels in delights, self-gratification, and the indulgence of every impure and sinful lust? Christ, who invites us to mortification by the noblest and holiest motives; or the world, that from motives of selfishness and unmitigated tyranny imposes the heaviest and most

irksome burdens upon us? Christ, whose open war-cry is: conquer yourself, that you may obtain the victory and save your soul; or the world, whose watch-word is, not in plain terms, but in covert deceit: mortify yourself, that you may become my slave, and reap eternal misery for your reward?

Choose now, beloved brethren, between the cross of Jesus Christ and the cross which the world imposes; for one of the two crosses we must bear. But make that choice that will do honor to your good judgment and noble sentiments. If you decide for the world, you must bear a cross which is incomparably heavier and more irksome than the cross of Christ, and you must bear it without comfort, without merit, and without compensation. But if you declare yourself for Christ, and take upon you His cross, the sweet yoke of Christian mortification, He will help you to bear it; His grace will smoothe the path of penance before you, fill your heart with joy and consolation; you will obtain the glorious victory over your passions and over sin; and your Lord and Leader, Jesus Christ, will once grace your brow with the radiant crown which He has prepared for His elect. Amen.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

HABITUAL SIN.

"He that is of God heareth the words of God."—John viii. 47.

THE meaning of these words is: he who belongs to God, or is a child of God, not only hears the word of God—for this even the Jews did, whom our blessed Lord here addresses—but he is also well affected towards God's word, and regulates his life according to it. Hence it follows that sinners, whose lives are at variance with the word of God, do not belong to God, but to His adversary; that they are not children of God, but children of the devil. For, as our blessed Lord expressly says: "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. xii. 30). Hence it is manifest that sinners, who are not children of God, are necessarily children of Satan. Therefore, St. John says: "He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1. John iii. 8), and draws the evident conclusion that all sinners are "children of the devil" (Ibid. 10). If this is true of all sinners, it is most emphatically true of habitual sinners, that is, of those who are entangled in a sinful habit. I have, therefore, to-day chosen for my subject *habitual sin*, or the habit of sin. The end which I have in view is to warn you against the danger of falling into sinful habits; or, if any of you should be so unfortunate as to be caught in the meshes of such a habit, to suggest to you the means to extricate yourselves. To obtain this twofold purpose I will show you—

1. *The pernicious effects of the habit of sin;*
2. *The means to overcome it.*

I. EFFECTS.

By sinful habit, or habitual sin, is understood the habit or facility of committing a certain sin, acquired by frequent relapses into the same sin. A habitual sinner is, accordingly, one who by frequent relapses into the same sin, say, swearing, drunkenness, impurity, has acquired a readiness and facility of committing that sin. Such a sinner, as you may easily perceive, is in the most piteous condition, because of the pernicious effects of his sinful habit.

1. His sinful habit puts him in a condition much more lamentable than that of the leper, whose body is covered with ulcers, and presents, as it were, one loathsome mass of corruption. For sin, which disfigures the soul, is much more hideous than the most repulsive bodily affection. But his sinful habit also draws him into *numberless sins.* Take as an instance any habitual sinner; look at the habitual swearer, blasphemer, drunkard, the slave of impurity. Who can count the number of sins, internal and external, into which his sinful habit leads him? Is he not entirely ruled by his besetting sin? Is not his life one unbroken chain of sins? Is it not true, then, that his soul is covered with the most noisome ulcers, a mass of corruption, more abominable in the eyes of God than is in our eyes the most loathsome bodily disease?

2. Another pernicious effect, closely allied to the former, might be compared to a gangrene, which is wont to result from severe wounds. As soon as it sets in, all pain ceases, the patient feels relieved, is no longer conscious of the danger of his condition, thinks he is in perfect health, and rejoices in this fatal development of his malady. Such is the state of the habitual sinner. While his soul is bleeding from a thousand wounds, the deadly gangrene sets in; he loses all consciousness of

his wretched state, and becomes wholly *indifferent* to his imminent danger, for the number of sins occasioned by his sinful habit gradually benumbs his conscience, so that he no longer feels the weight of his sins. Thus it happens that he continues to live unconcerned in his sinful state, and, instead of being ashamed of his sins and detesting them, goes even so far as to boast of them as of something honorable. Do we not often meet habitual blasphemers, who glory in their blasphemies? Do we not find drunkards, who are not in the least ashamed of their beastly passions? Do we not see votaries of impurity, who consider their shameful excesses only as trifles and pardonable weaknesses? And are there not many such slaves of sin, who do not blush to speak openly of, and glory in their disgraceful vices? Does not the Holy Ghost tell us, that "the wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth" (Prov. xviii. 3); and that sinners "are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things"? (Ibid. ii. 14.)

3. Though all habitual sinners may not have come to this pass, yet they are, one and all, fettered in the bonds of sin; for a third effect of sinful habit is that it makes sin, as it were, a second nature, a kind of vital *necessity*. Habit gradually gains such power over man, that it impels him to sin, without any external stimulant or temptation, and almost against his will, merely by its own inherent force. Is it not evident, then, that the salvation of such men is in the most imminent peril? Their condition is like that of one who has gradually descended a precipice, which he cannot re-ascend but with extreme difficulty and danger.

4. But what makes the condition of the habitual sinner still more critical is the circumstance that even the most powerful remedies, the *sacraments* themselves,

commonly *fail of their efficacy* in his case. There are many habitual sinners who, still possessing some remnant of faith and religion, approach the sacraments from time to time. But, notwithstanding the efficacy of these means of grace, yet, in the case of such habitual sinners they remain without fruit, or, at least, without any lasting salutary effect; for they receive the sacraments unworthily, or, at least, unfruitfully.

Most of them receive the sacraments *unworthily*, that is, they receive them without a true sorrow for their sins, and without a firm purpose of amendment; because they very often do not intend to better their lives, but only wish to comply with the custom of good Christians, and be able to say to themselves, that they have received the sacraments; and thus they quiet their conscience for the moment. For these the sacraments are manifestly not a means of salvation, but the poison of their souls, and a cause of deeper damnation.

In the case of others, who receive them not unworthily, the sacraments produce *no lasting salutary results*, because they receive them but seldom. For by worthy confession the sin itself, 'tis true, is taken away, but not so the inclination to sin. But in the case of habitual sinners the inclination to sin is exceedingly strong. Therefore, if a long time intervene between their confessions, they invariably relapse into their former sins; nay, they, too, are in the greatest danger, in the course of time, to receive the sacraments without true sorrow and purpose of amendment; and then the words of Our Saviour are realized in their case, "Their last state becomes worse than the first" (Luke xi. 26).

5. Need we wonder, then, beloved brethren, if such an inveterate habitual sinner finally gives up all hope of amendment, and *in despair* surrenders himself to the mercy of his unbridled passions? To this dreadful pass

the sinful habit often brings its victim; and this is its last and most fatal effect. In fact, when the slave of sin sees that, despite his efforts, he relapses again and again into the same sins, the temptation easily assails him to give up all resistance and abandon himself supinely to the bent of his passions. And would to God that there were but few who yielded to this temptation!

Now I ask you, beloved brethren, is not the habitual sinner in the greatest danger of dying an *unhappy death* and forfeiting his eternal salvation? Does not his sinful habit lead him step by step to eternal ruin? It draws him into countless sins; it makes him indifferent to his own lamentable state; it makes sin a second nature, and almost a necessity for him; it makes the grace of the sacraments inefficacious; it finally drives him to despair and delivers him mercilessly to the capricious tyranny of his unruly passions. May the all-merciful God protect us against such an evil! But to assure ourselves of the mercy of God, which never fails even the most hardened habitual sinner, provided he is only of good will, we must also co-operate with His mercy and grace, and employ the necessary remedies.

II. REMEDIES.

The means against this greatest of all evils are partly preservative and partly remedial, according as they are employed to prevent the evil or to remove it, if it already exists.

1. The chief *preservative* against sinful habits consists, first, in carefully avoiding every mortal sin; and, secondly, if one happens to have fallen into mortal sin, in not continuing in that sad state, but arising at once and seeking to be reconciled with God by a good confession. Beloved brethren, I cannot lay sufficient stress on this point. He who after the fall into sin arises

immediately will not easily contract the habit of sin, because confession is the best means against relapse. But if one continues in the state of sin, he exposes himself to the greatest danger of falling back repeatedly into the same sin and thus becoming an habitual sinner; for, in that case, he deprives himself of the ordinary protection against relapse, which lies in the sacrament of penance—sacramental grace and the natural horror of sin, which arises from confessing it.

Our holy faith teaches us that the sacrament of penance worthily received not only restores to the sinner sanctifying grace, but entitles him also to *actual graces*, which preserve him from relapse into sin. And holy Communion, which is the bread of life, has the effect to preserve the supernatural life of the soul, as our material food sustains the life of the body. Therefore the chief fruit of the Blessed Sacrament also is to preserve us from mortal sin, which takes away the spiritual life of the soul.

What, furthermore, naturally deters a man who is not an habitual sinner from the relapse into sin, is the fear and *horror* which sin at first inspires, and the confusion and remorse which it excites. But if the sinner continues in his sinful state and puts off his confession, these salutary sentiments of fear and sorrow gradually lose their force and finally vanish entirely, leaving him utterly unequipped against the assaults of temptation. Whoever wishes, therefore, to guard against relapse and secure himself against the danger of becoming an habitual sinner must not remain in his sin, but must without delay take refuge to the tribunal of penance. Here we have an infallible preservative against the evil habit of sin.

2. But what are those to do who are already entangled in the meshes of a sinful habit? Shall they

follow the inspiration of the enemy and give up all hope of amendment? No, beloved brethren; God forbid! That would be the worst they could do. But at the same time they must not make light of the danger of their sad condition, and think that it is, after all, not so hard to emerge from their sad state. This would be a very dangerous illusion. No, my friends, there is need of earnest, resolute, and continued effort on their part, to *work themselves out* of those bonds that fetter them.

The first thing, then, that the habitual sinner has to do, is to *enter into himself* seriously, and to convince himself that the way on which he has thus far walked is the direct way to hell. And this conviction he will easily gain, if he considers the ruinous effects of his evil habit, which he has already in great part experienced in his own case.

The second step is, confiding in the grace of God, which will never be wanting to him, to make the generous *resolve*, whatever sacrifice and effort it may cost him, to shake off the fetters of sin and the sinful habit in which he is shackled. If he has once taken this resolve, let him prepare himself for a good *confession*. In most cases it will be necessary for him to make a general confession, either of his whole life, or, at least, of the time he has been the slave of his sinful habit. By such a thorough-going confession of his sin he will obtain, together with the grace of God, peace of heart, and will be filled with confidence in God, manly courage, and an unspeakable joy. He is now upon the right way to his last end; his further task is to walk perseveringly upon this path to eternal happiness.

To perform this third and most difficult task, to *persevere* on the path of salvation, he must with more than ordinary care employ the necessary *means of grace*; above all, he must pray, frequent the sacraments, and

avoid the occasion of sin. He must pray, that is, say his daily prayers regularly and devoutly, night and morning; regularly attend the services of the Church; and not neglect in temptation to have confident recourse in prayer to God, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to His holy Mother Mary. He must frequent the sacraments at stated times, well prepared, that he may draw strength from the fountains of the Saviour. He must avoid the occasions, that is, carefully shun all persons, places, and things which, he knows, would lead him to relapse. And, if after all he should in an evil moment yield to the temptation, *let him not despond*, as if all were lost; but let him return immediately to be cleansed from his sin in the sacrament of penance.

All this, beloved brethren, is absolutely necessary for the habitual sinner, in order to break the bonds of sinful habit, and secure the work of his salvation. If he refuse to submit himself to this treatment, and prefer to hug the delusion of a future, as it were, miraculous conversion, it is greatly to be feared that death will surprise him in his sins, and that the enemy will succeed in dragging him by the chains of his evil habit into the bottomless abyss of perdition. But if he employs these God-given remedies seriously and consistently, he will regain the freedom of the children of God and the outlook of the everlasting life of bliss, to which God will lead all those who are earnestly concerned for their salvation, and who rely upon His infinite goodness and mercy. Amen.

Palm Sunday.

THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST.

"Behold, thy king cometh to thee, meek."—Matt. xxi. 5.

THESE words of the Gospel, beloved brethren, borrowed partly from the prophet Zacharias, and partly, according to the sense, from the prophet Isaias, express the character of our blessed Lord in His capacity of king. He had been announced by the prophets as the shepherd, the king, the leader; who was to gather all men into His fold, make them members of His kingdom, and lead them to a glorious victory; who was to rule in the house of Jacob forever, and of whose kingdom there should be no end. His Gospel is, therefore, a solemn invitation to enter His kingdom, to become His subjects, to follow Him. Therefore, to be a Christian and to follow Jesus Christ mean one and the same thing.

But, as the author of the "Imitation of Christ" says, while many are ready to follow Jesus Christ unto the breaking of bread, few are prepared to follow Him to the drinking of the chalice of His passion. This fact we see illustrated in to-day's mystery. To-day the multitude go out to honor Him as their king, bearing palms in their hands, strewing their garments beneath His feet; but in a few days they will abandon Him to the fury of His enemies. Ready to follow Him in the way of His joy and glory, they forsake Him in the day of sorrow and shame. Would we, beloved brethren, have part in His triumph and glory, we must

share in His hardships and humiliations; we must follow Him not only to the Last Supper, but also to Gethsemane, to Calvary, to the Cross. It is to such generous *following of Jesus Christ* that I would exhort you to-day. I shall, therefore, endeavor briefly to show you that, if we would be true Christians and save our souls, we must necessarily follow Jesus Christ; and, that you may not be disheartened by the greatness of the enterprise, I shall further prove to you that the following of Christ is, after all, not so difficult. In other words, the following of Christ is—

1. *Absolutely necessary;*
2. *Comparatively easy.*

I. ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

1. The following of Christ is, in the first place, absolutely necessary, because it is an *indispensable condition* on the part of Almighty God for our salvation. For, in what does the following of Christ consist? It consists in our conformity with Jesus Christ, the first-born of God's elect, the head of the mystical body of God's household, and the model of every true child of God. That this conformity with Jesus Christ is a necessary condition of our eternal salvation, the apostle St. Paul expressly teaches. In his Epistle to the Ephesians he writes: "God hath chosen us in Him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight, in charity; and He hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ" (Eph. i. 4, 5). To the Romans he writes: "Whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born amongst many brethren" (Rom. viii. 29). From these words it is manifest that to be saved we must be chosen and predestined by

God. But on what condition does God extend this predilection to His chosen ones? On the condition that they be *conformed to Jesus Christ*, that they bear His likeness.

And how could it be otherwise? If Jesus Christ is the *first-born* of many brethren, the first-born of the elect of God, to be predestined with Him, we must be His joint-heirs, His brethren; we must be like to Him. But how can we claim this kindred, this brotherhood and likeness to Jesus Christ, unless we conform ourselves to Him, who is the first-born of God's heirs? If, then, we would be of the elect of God, we must live, think, feel, and act like Jesus Christ, the first-born of the divine household.

But the chief reason why we cannot without this likeness to Jesus Christ be predestined lies in the *predilection* of the heavenly Father *for His divine Son*. He is the direct and primary object of the Father's love, since He is the Father's own living and substantial image. The Father loves all things else in Him, according to their greater or less resemblance to Him. In whomsoever, therefore, God the Father sees an eminent likeness to His only-begotten Son, him He loves tenderly and intensely; if He finds but few traits of likeness, His love for such a one is less tender and intense; if He discovers no likeness, He withholds His love from him; if, finally, he observes in any one traits opposed to the character of Jesus Christ, He strikes the name of such a one from the rolls of the elect.

All the dealings of Almighty God with the soul of man are directed towards bringing him to a perfect likeness with His divine Son. For this end He created man; for this end He sanctified him with His supernatural grace; for this end He sent His only-begotten Son in the flesh. The Son of God took to Himself our

human nature, becoming like unto us, that we might the more easily become like to Him. All the teaching of Jesus Christ, by word and example, has the same purpose; all His commandments and counsels, all the saving institutions of His Church; the Church itself, its sacraments; His entire Gospel;—all have the same end, to make us conformable to the image of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If, then, Almighty God has done so much to produce in us this likeness to His divine Son, would it not be a downright shame for us, were it nothing more, to neglect, or even to efface from our souls, the divine image? But it is more than a shame; it is a sin, and a sacrilege, and a mark of eternal reprobation, because likeness to Jesus Christ is the necessary condition of our predestination to glory.

2. The following of Christ is also necessary for salvation, because it forms an essential part in God's *plan of Redemption.* God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might have life, and have it abundantly. How was Christ, the Son of God, to restore this supernatural life to us? Was it by His preaching? Not by preaching only. Was it by His sacraments? Not alone. Was it by His passion and death? Not even His passion and death constitute the entire design of the heavenly Father. One of His chief ends in sending His divine Son in the flesh was, that He, the God-man, might be our *model.* This was manifestly the chief object of Jesus Christ in His earthly career. Therefore, He does not introduce Himself merely as a teacher, to direct and guide us on the way of salvation, but He says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John xiv. 6). He is, therefore, not only our guide and teacher, and the giver of supernatural life, but He is Himself the living way, according to which we must walk; the living truth, to which our thoughts and

affections must conform; and the visible and concrete life, according to which we must shape our lives; in other words, we must walk and act, think and live, as did Jesus Christ, our model.

Accordingly, after having washed the feet of His disciples at the Last Supper, He said to them: "I have given you an *example*, that, as I have done to you, so you do also" (John xiii. 15). These same words, that are spoken here, as it were, incidentally, apply to all His actions. He was humble, meek, and patient; He gave us an example. He despised honors, and sought humiliation; He gave us an example. He forgave His enemies, and prayed for His executioners; He gave us an example. He embraced the cross and bore it without a murmur; He gave us an example, that, as He has done, so we also may do. We must, therefore, conclude that it was one of the chief designs of the Father in sending His only-begotten Son, and the main object of the Son of God made man, that we should have in Him a model, according to which we might conform our lives and all our actions. Neither the Father nor the Son can, therefore, be indifferent whether or not we imitate this model; but they must exact from us this conformity with the God-man, Jesus Christ, as an essential part of the work of our salvation. It is manifest, then, that the following of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary, if we would comply with the designs of the heavenly Father and fulfil the wishes of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour.

3. Finally, the following of Christ is necessary as an essential feature of a *true Christian life*. It is certain that we cannot be saved, unless we are true Christians, in the real sense of the word, and according to the ideal given in Jesus Christ. Now, what is a true Christian, beloved brethren? Is he a disciple of Christ, one who

professes the doctrine of Jesus Christ, one who has been born in a Christian age, and has, perhaps, received Christian baptism? No, my dear friends; all this does not constitute a true Christian. A true Christian is one who follows Jesus Christ. Why are we called upon in baptism to "renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his pomps"? Is it not to conform us with Jesus Christ? To be a true Christian, therefore, it is not enough to bear the name; we must live up to the ideal which is expressed in the name; this we cannot do unless we follow Jesus Christ. In any other supposition we are Christians in name and appearance only, and have not the genuine spirit of Christianity. A true Christian is he who takes Jesus Christ for his model and labors to become a living and faithful copy of the divine original, so that, in the words of St. Paul, he can say, the life of Christ is made manifest in his mortal flesh; and again, with the same apostle, "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). Such is the portrait of a true Christian—a true copy of Jesus Christ; one who acts, and speaks, and thinks like Jesus Christ; a second Christ.

Is that portrait yours, beloved brethren? Do you perceive those traits of Jesus Christ marked upon your life and conduct? Is this kindred likeness of the first-born of God's elect stamped upon you? Do you bear the humility, and meekness, and forbearance, and charity, and spotlessness of Jesus Christ engraven upon your heart and delineated upon your person? If so, you are a true follower of Jesus Christ and bear the mark of God's elect upon your brow; but if not, you have great reason to fear that you are a Christian in name only, and that, when you present yourself to the divine Spouse of your soul, He will not recognize you as His own, and will say: "I know you not." Let us,

then, beloved brethren, while there is yet time, while Jesus Christ still calls us, generously enter the ranks of His true followers; let us invest ourselves with His divine character, and follow Him faithfully, whithersoever He leads us. To follow Christ is absolutely necessary for salvation. But at the same time, as I hope to show you, it is—

II. COMPARATIVELY EASY.

Whilst the example of a great leader of itself exerts a most powerful influence over the hearts and minds of his followers, there are circumstances which contribute in no small degree to make the duty of allegiance sweet and honorable, and, as a consequence, to render our service, though most arduous in itself, comparatively easy in practice. Such circumstances are chiefly four: the dignity of the leader; his relation to his followers; the motives which prompt him, and the rewards which he offers. Now, these four circumstances combined make the example of Jesus Christ most efficacious, inspire the hearts of His followers with courage, and thus render the duty of following Him most easy and agreeable.

1. With regard to His *dignity*, suffice it to say that He is our rightful *king* and leader. Subjects are naturally inclined to follow their king, both from a sense of duty and from self-respect. That Jesus Christ is our lawful king, we have from His own words spoken before Pilate. Therefore, despite the machinations of the Jews, the title remained on the cross, written in the three languages that represented the civilized world, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." He is our king by right of inheritance, in that He is the God-man, the Son of God, the figure of the Father's substance and splendor of His glory, equal to Him in all things. Our

king, again, by right of the divine mission entrusted to Him by His heavenly Father. He is the Messias, the anointed of God, who is to rule His people. Our king, once more, by right of conquest, for having delivered us from the power of darkness by His victory over Satan and sin. Lastly, He is our king by our own choice; for it was He whom we chose as our king and leader when we renounced Satan at our baptism.

What are the *royal attributes* of this God-appointed and chosen king? He is a king both great and good. He is *great as man*, for He possesses all virtues and graces, natural and supernatural, acquired and infused, in a most eminent degree; all fulness of knowledge, wisdom, and greatness of soul. He is the true ideal of humanity. He is *great as God;* for He possesses, in virtue of the hypostatic union with the Godhead, the fulness of God's infinite perfections—His omnipotence, His immensity, His eternity, His infinity.

But He is no less *good* than great. Goodness, love, and gentleness are the salient attributes of our great king. Not with the blood of His subjects did He cement the foundations of His kingdom. No, He cemented them with His own blood, to secure to His subjects against their enemies an impregnable stronghold. He imposes no cruel and unjust laws upon us, but only those that He Himself fulfilled in His mortal life. He overlooks not the slightest merit of His followers, but rewards their least actions and even their good desires and intentions with an eternal recompense. Is He not truly a great and good king? Are not the honor and privilege of serving such a master, and following such a leader, something great beyond expression?

2. The second circumstance which renders the following of Jesus Christ easy and pleasurable is the

character of those *relations* which we bear towards Him. He is not only our king; He is also our Creator, our Redeemer, our Father, our Brother, the Spouse of our souls; He is our supreme Pastor, our Friend, the Physician of our souls. How can a creature refuse to love and follow his Creator? Can a ransomed prisoner withhold love and affection from the benefactor who delivered him from prison at the cost of his own life? Can a dutiful child forget a most loving and bountiful father? Will a brother prove ungrateful to the brother who has admitted him to an equal share of his inheritance? Will the bride not willingly follow the spouse who gives her an eternal kingdom for her dowry? Where is the shepherd that feeds his sheep with his own flesh, and gives them his blood for their drink? Will the friend not love the friend who lays down his life for him? Will the patient show himself indifferent towards the physician, who rescued him from the jaws, not of temporal, but of eternal death? Can we, then, beloved brethren, withhold our love and devotion from Him who has most lovingly and effectually fulfilled all those offices towards us?

3. The third circumstance which, as I said, inspires enthusiasm for a great leader, is the character of the *motives* which actuate him in his enterprise. What, then, is the great prompting motive in the grand campaign of our divine king and leader? It is the purest and tenderest *love* for His subjects. It was His unbounded love for us which prompted Him to give such striking instances of humility, meekness, patience, self-abnegation, poverty, obedience. It was His love for us that impelled Him to embrace the sufferings, humiliations, and shame of the cross. For none of those sacrifices on His part was necessary for our Redemption; they were all prompted by the excess of His

love. But though they were not necessary on the part of the Redeemer, they were necessary for us, to be reconciled with our offended God. We it was, who should have submitted to all those indignities, and humiliations, and sufferings. But Jesus Christ took them upon Himself, in order to sweeten the bitterness we find in them, and by His example to inspire us with courage to do and suffer that little which is required of us as an atonement for our sins. Like a loving mother, who, encouraging her child to take a bitter draught of medicine, first tastes it herself, though she has no need of it, He not only tasted, but drained the bitter cup of satisfaction for our sins. Must we, then, beloved brethren, not generously correspond with such heroic love of our Lord and leader, Jesus Christ? Yes, my dear friends, unless we would incur the most shameful reproach of being heartless and ignoble cowards, we cannot shrink from any sacrifice in the service of such a master.

4. I would not, beloved brethren, extenuate the greatness of the sacrifices to be made in the following of Jesus Christ, but what comparison can there be between the sacrifices and the *rewards* with which He proposes to recompense us. Earthly sovereigns offer as rewards doubtful victories, perishable riches, short-lived honors—all empty bubbles. Jesus Christ gives His faithful followers a certain and decisive victory over the enemies of their salvation: over Satan and sin; over the world and its enslaving riches, honors, and pleasures; over themselves, over their pride, avarice, and lust, and over all the depraved cravings of the flesh —a thorough and complete victory. Jesus Christ gives as a reward the imperishable and inexhaustible riches of His heavenly kingdom; riches which no eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor heart of man hath conceived.

The reward proposed to us by Jesus Christ is that same glory with which He Himself was crowned by His heavenly Father; the glory, and immortality, and splendor of His resuscitated body; the full possession of God, the source of all delight; a glorious throne at His right hand in the celestial court. And this infinite reward is to last forever, unchanged and undiminished. Who, then, would refuse to follow a leader who holds out such rewards? What base cowardice to shrink from hardships, privations, and sufferings in the service of such a king! For, "if we suffer with Him," says the Apostle, "we shall be glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. viii. 17, 18).

Let us, then, beloved brethren, bravely gird on the armor of Jesus Christ, and follow Him manfully in the glorious path whereon He leads us. Thus, while performing a duty of the strictest necessity, we shall experience the sweetness of the service of Jesus Christ, and shall gain the crown of glory prepared for His faithful followers. Amen.

Low Sunday.

CONFESSION.

"Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."— John xx. 23.

THESE words of our blessed Lord enunciate a duty no less consoling than imperative. Sin is the greatest evil. He who dies in the state of grievous sin is irretrievably lost. But we are all sinners; we have all, sad to think, often, and most of us grievously, offended Almighty God. We must all, then, anxiously ask ourselves: Am I hopelessly lost? Is there no salvation, no remedy for me? A dreadful question! But our holy faith gives us a consoling solution of this momentous question. It teaches us that God, the All-merciful, is ready at any moment to pardon all our sins, if we have a hearty sorrow for them, together with a firm purpose of avoiding them in future, and sincerely *confess* them to a priest lawfully approved and commissioned by the Church as Christ's minister and representative. That sorrow and purpose of amendment are necessary is self-evident, since God cannot pardon sin as long as the sinner does not efficaciously correct the perversity of his evil will and intentions. But what is to be said of the necessity of confession, or the self-accusation of our sins? Confession is also necessary. Confession is a strict obligation, because God has instituted it as an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance; but, while it is an obligation of the most rigorous necessity, it is, at the same time, a most consol-

ing duty. These two truths relating to the holy Sacrament of Penance I would impress upon you to-day, by showing you that the full and sincere *confession* of our sins to a priest is—

1. *Of divine institution;*
2. *Most salutary in its effects.*

I. DIVINE INSTITUTION.

The divine institution of confession may be proved to evidence from reason itself, as well as from Scripture and Tradition.

1. *Reason.* It is a patent fact, beloved brethren, that confession is at this day an existing institution in the Catholic Church. Confession is an accomplished fact. Now, by whom has confession been introduced in the Church? By man, or by God? If by man, it was certainly not by the laity, as it would evidently be their greatest interest to oppose the introduction of such an institution. It would follow, then, that it was introduced by the *priesthood*. But I maintain that the priests neither *would* nor *could* introduce such an institution.

a. They *would not* introduce such an institution, because, in the first place, they are not capable of such a *heinous crime*. Or do you think that any, I will not say individual, but body of men, could be so depraved, so heartless, so unscrupulous, and so inhuman, as to impose upon their fellow-men such a heavy burden without any lawful right, and thus trifle with the conscience of men and with their eternal salvation? Who shall make us believe the possibility of such a fact?

They would not, in the second place, introduce confession, because men are incapable of *inexplicable folly*, such as would be the imposition on themselves of the ungrateful necessity of not only confessing their own sins—which priests are obliged to do in the Catholic

Church—but also the very unpleasant duty of hearing for long and weary hours the confessions of others. The obligation of confessing sins is no pleasure, as even we, who believe in its necessity, well know. What would it be in the supposition that it was not only optional, but superfluous, and one's own vain and curious invention? In such a case it would be a racking self-torture, a downright madness. And hearing others' confessions, in itself the heaviest and most irksome duty of the priest, would, in the case of confession being a deceitful invention and innovation, be a self-inflicted martyrdom, to which no priest in his senses would submit. I ask you, then, beloved brethren, would not priests, if they inflicted on themselves such a torture, and imposed upon themselves such an unbearable burden, be the most foolish of men? The priesthood would not, therefore, introduce the institution of confession, if they could; nor would they submit to it, unless constrained by the gravest necessity of duty.

b. But suppose them wicked and foolish enough to attempt to introduce such an institution, they *could not.* Beloved brethren, if up to this moment you had never heard of confession, and a priest came before you, and called upon you for the first time to confess all your sins to him, alleging such confession was necessary to obtain forgiveness from God, would you believe him? Would you not find it very strange that such an obligation was never before heard of; that the Church, the pillar and ground of truth, had for centuries overlooked a matter of so grave importance; that now, unexpectedly and without any authority, such an obnoxious law was to be enforced, and even a new sacrament instituted—a thing which exceeds even the power confided by Christ to His Church?

Would you tamely submit to the imposition of such an obligation? Is it not equally certain that the Christians of former ages would think and act in the same manner, and that, consequently, every attempt at introducing such a custom would meet with certain defeat?

c. "But," say the enemies of the Church, "confession has not been introduced by one or several individual priests, but by a *conspiracy* of the whole order of the priesthood." I ask you, my dear friends, what would you think of me if, at this moment, I should say in all seriousness: All merchants, or all public officials, not only of a certain city or country, but of the whole world, are cheats and robbers? Would you not be amazed at my rashness? Would you not say to yourselves: Why, is the man not ashamed thus to blacken the characters of an entire class of society? Does he not see the impropriety of thus insulting a respectable body of men? Your honest judgment tells you that the entire reproach would fall back on my own head; and justly so. Yet men blush not to insult the entire body of a most venerable, upright, and enlightened class of human society, the Catholic priesthood; and to brand it as a caste made up of the most infamous liars and tricksters! Is not this a most bare-faced and shameful slander? Do not such reproaches fall upon the heads of the very men who utter them?

Besides, who is there that does not see the *impossibility* of such a conspiracy? Is it possible that so many thousands of priests, of so diverse nationalities, characters, interests, and propensities, living in very distant lands and in various ages, could, without exciting suspicion, unite in so absurd and wicked a conspiracy, and carry it on for so many centuries, without

even incurring the risk of being detected? Any man who considers such things possible is beyond cure.

The priesthood could not, therefore, and would not introduce the custom of confession in the Church; and, consequently, they have not introduced it. This conclusion, evident in itself, receives a further confirmation from the fact that at times the priest must hear confessions with the risk, or even at the *cost of his life*. And do you think priests would face such danger, were they not convinced of the necessity of confession? But would they be convinced of its necessity, if they themselves had been the deceitful authors of its introduction?

d. All very true, some one may say, in the supposition that it has been introduced by the priests as such; but the case will be different if we suppose that it has been introduced by the *pope* or a *council* of the Church.

We ask that the pope should be named or the council indicated that introduced confession. The only names, to my knowledge, that have ever been mentioned in connection with this supposed fact are those of Innocent III., Gregory VII.; the only council, the Fourth Council of Lateran. With regard to the two popes named, every one acquainted even moderately with Church history is aware that both had a host of the most bitter and powerful enemies. In fact, almost all the kings and princes of Christendom were arrayed against them. If, then, either of these Popes had attempted arbitrarily to introduce the odious novelty of confession, he would have been as sure to encounter defeat, as if he had been the most humble in the ranks of the clergy; nay, on account of the number and power of his enemies he would have met with even greater resistance. And if, using his supreme power as pope, he had enforced such a measure, would

not such despotic abuse of authority have created an unheard of sensation in Christendom? Hostile potentates would have exulted that their common adversary had given them such a pretext for opposition. What capital would they not make of so grievous a mistake! How they would sound the alarm in every country! Would not such an important fact leave its indelible traces on the history of the times? Would not histories teem with the most detailed and circumstantial accounts of such an event? Now, it is established beyond a doubt that in contemporary history there is not a word, not even the slightest hint, of such a momentous fact. Is not this silence of history sufficient to convince every man or woman possessed of reason that the charge is an invention of later times, and nothing else than a clumsy and malicious calumny?

No less unfounded is the charge that confession was introduced by the *IV. Council of Lateran.* Examine for yourselves, beloved brethren, the words of the decree of Lateran. "Every one of the faithful," this is the wording of the law, "whether man or woman, shall confess at least once a year." Is that an introduction of confession? Is that not manifestly an enforcement of an already existing custom? Do not these words show plainly that at the time alleged confession was an existing institution? This conclusion is the very contrary of what our adversaries wish to assert.

Confession is, therefore, not an invention or institution of man, but a duty imposed by God Himself. This, as you see, is the teaching of common sense; and we shall further find it to be the teaching of Holy Scripture.

2. *Scripture.* That confession has a divine origin appears clearly from the words of our text: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained."

a. Thus Christ gives His apostles *judicial* power, and constitutes them judges of the faithful in reference to remission or retention of their sins. Had He merely said: "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them," He would have given them a power restricted to the exercise of mercy towards sinners; but when He adds: "Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained," He gives them a twofold power, viz., a power to absolve and a power to condemn. Such a twofold power constitutes true judicial authority.

b. Nor does Christ give this power to His apostles alone; He gives it likewise to all their lawful *successors.* The reason is that all powers and prerogatives necessary for securing to the faithful a participation in the fruits of the Redemption have been given by Christ not merely to the apostles personally, but also to their lawful successors. This is necessary to secure permanency of those rights in His Church; for without such permanency the contemporaries of the apostles alone would have been benefited, whilst the fact is, all succeeding generations were also to become partakers of the Redemption through Jesus Christ. Now, it must be manifest to all that the power to forgive and retain sins is included in those prerogatives necessary for making us partakers of the fruits of Redemption. For this reason it has been given, not only to the apostles personally, but to their successors as well. But, since Catholic priests receive ordination and mission from the apostles in their successors, and are invested, consequently, with the same power, evidently they, too, are judges, possessed of true judicial power.

c. Hence follows as a necessary consequence the strict obligation of confession; for, the exercise of judicial power is impossible without *cognizance of the facts* on which judgment is to be pronounced. The

spiritual judge of the soul must, therefore, in each case, as far as it is possible, considering the weakness of human nature, have an exact knowledge of the degree of the penitent's guilt and of the true state of his conscience, in order that, in each case, he may with moral certainty form judgment, whether he may forgive or retain, whether he may loose or bind. He must, therefore, before making use of his judicial power, before passing the sentence of condonation or condemnation, take cognizance of the case. Very singular would be the procedure of the judge who would at once pronounce sentence, without being first thoroughly informed of the state of the case to be decided. The priest must, therefore, first know the sins on which he has to pass judgment. But the only means available in all cases for arriving at this knowledge, and the means which God has instituted, is the self-accusation or confession of his sins by the sinner. Hence the necessity of confession follows evidently from the words of Our Lord. Jesus Christ Himself is, therefore, the author and institutor of confession. The same truth we find confirmed by Tradition.

3. *Tradition.* It is an undeniable fact that in the Church the necessity of confession was from the earliest times believed and acted upon. This belief is testified as early as the third century by *Origen.* In his Second Homily on the fourth chapter of Leviticus he assures all sinners of forgiveness, provided they water their couch with tears, and are not ashamed to acknowledge their sins to the priest of the Lord, and sue forgiveness from him. And *Tertullian*, in the ninth chapter of his book on Penance, writes: "While confession accuses, it excuses; and while it condemns, it absolves. There are many who refuse to confess, mindful more

of their supposed shame than of their salvation." And he compares such sinners to certain bashful patients, who are ashamed to acknowledge their ailments, even though by silence they risk their lives. The same is testified in the first century by *St. Clement*, pope, or whoever is the author of the "Second Epistle to the Corinthians," commonly attributed to this pope. In that epistle we read: "Do penance while you live; for after death you can neither do penance, nor confess." The same is attested by *Holy Writ* itself; for in the Acts of the Apostles we read (Acts xix. 18) that after the sermons preached by St. Paul many of the faithful came, confessing their works, that is, their sins.

Confession is, therefore, of divine origin; it is instituted by God Himself; this is the uniform testimony of reason, Scripture, and Tradition. It is, therefore, a strict obligation. But it is at the same time a most consoling duty, being the source of numberless blessings, as we shall see in considering its effects.

II. SALUTARY EFFECTS.

I shall be obliged to confine myself to the chief effects of confession.

1. The first salutary effect proper to confession is the *uprooting of vices* and evil habits. Confession is a most powerful preventive against relapse into habitual sins. Even the thought of being obliged to confess our sins is a powerful restraint against the commission of sin. But confession itself is a much more efficacious preservative. For it is essential to a good confession that there should be a true sorrow for the past, and a firm purpose of amendment for the future; necessarily these dispositions include the earnest intention of avoiding, to the best of our power, all proximate occasions of sin. What powerful protection

against sin, therefore, is afforded by true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment!

This efficacy is self-evident from the very nature of the case, but is also attested by daily *experience;* and, first, by the *personal* experience of every individual. You need but recall to mind, my dear friend, the time when you, like many others, were entangled in the slavery of sin. Did you not feel the heavy weight of your own affliction? Now, when you burst the galling fetters that bound you, and regained the freedom of the children of God and the peace for which your heart yearned, to what, did you feel, you owed this precious liberty? Did you not gratefully attribute your deliverance to confession?

And what individuals have proved, each in his own case, will be found to be the *general* experience. Compare the life of those Christians who frequently approach the holy Sacrament of Penance with that of lukewarm Christians, who to any great extent or totally neglect this duty. What a wide difference in their lives, in the state of their souls, in their conscience! Merely a passing glance at the difference suffices to make the efficacy of confession palpable to the most careless observer. Even the experience of our Protestant brethren bears out our assertion. Have they not repeatedly endeavored to re-establish the use of confession? Thus the Protestant citizens of Nürnberg in Germany petitioned the emperor Charles V. to re-introduce the use of the Sacrament of Penance. And in our own days attempts in the same direction have been made in England and elsewhere. Does this not plainly show us what many of our separated brethren think of the efficacy of confession? But the most striking testimony in this connection is given by Martin Luther himself, the prime mover of the Protestant Reformation. In

his book, entitled the "Babylonian Captivity," in the chapter on penance, he writes as follows: "I fully approve of the manner in which confession is practised among Catholics. I would not have confession abolished; it is useful, and even necessary, because it is a medicine for the infirm conscience."

2. The second chief effect of confession is that it *implants virtues* in the soul. This it does partly by the grace which it confers or augments, and partly by necessitating the exercise of various virtues which go to make up the disposition requisite for the worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance. Thus humility, the foundation of Christian virtue, is practised; faith is exercised; hope is strengthened; charity is enkindled in the heart of the sinner; while the just man is confirmed in his justice, and filled with new ardor for the practice of all good works.

3. The third of the chief effects of confession is an unspeakable *peace of heart*. Here, again, I appeal to your own experience. How unspeakably happy were you in the days of your innocence! Was not your heart a very paradise within you? But no sooner had sin robbed you of your innocence, than at once all your happiness vanished. What have you not done to silence the clamor of your own unhappiness! In what diversions and distractions did you not seek forgetfulness of your wretched state! The play-house, the drink-shop, the social gathering; in short, all means, whether lawful or unlawful, were invoked by turns. But in vain have you striven. Your affliction of spirit increased the more; the burden, that weighed down your heart, grew heavier from day to day. Undeceived at last, you listened to the voice of your conscience, shook off human respect, and made a contrite and upright confession of your sins. The priest had no sooner

pronounced over you the words, "I absolve thee from thy sins," than all your anxiety and distress vanished in the twinkling of an eye, and the long looked for peace returned to your heart.

Those are the chief effects of confession: vices are uprooted; virtues are implanted; and that peace which surpasseth all understanding, that peace which the world cannot give, is restored to the heart. Now, I ask, my dear friends, are these not precious fruits? Is it not true, then, that the obligation of confession is not only a strict duty, but also a most consoling one? And if this is true, if confession is as consoling as it is necessary, is there any excuse for us, if we neglect this duty? Oh, how bitter would be our remorse in our last moments, if we should neglect to avail ourselves of this precious boon! Firmly, therefore, resolve to-day, beloved brethren, to approach the holy sacraments frequently and regularly, and peace and consolation in life and in death, and eternal rest hereafter, will be your reward. Amen.

Second Sunday after Easter.

SALVATION.

"I lay down My life for My sheep."—John x. 15.

When Jesus Christ, according to His promise, laid down His life for us, the sheep of His fold, and died on the cross for us, He did so, as you are aware, to cancel the debt of our sins, and to re-open for us the gates of heaven. Hence it follows that we cannot too highly appreciate the work of *our salvation*; and, since it is impossible to attain our end without our own co-operation, we cannot employ sufficient care in the management of so momentous a business. For, if Christ, the Son of God, did not hesitate to shed His precious blood for the salvation of our souls, must it not be a matter of the greatest concern? Should we not, therefore, use every effort to work out our salvation? But this business, though of the utmost importance, is often, if not wholly, yet sadly neglected. Therefore, I shall endeavor to-day to impress the importance of this duty upon you and to incite you to new fervor in the work of your salvation. I therefore assert that the business of our salvation should claim our chief attention, because it is the most important and necessary of all our duties.

We shall, therefore, consider—

1. The *importance;*
2. The *necessity* of the work of our salvation.

I. IMPORTANCE.

That the work of our salvation is the most impor-

tant of all our duties is manifest from the fact that its object, namely, the *soul*, is of the most incalculable value. The soul of man is more valuable than heaven and earth with all their material treasures. This follows from the *excellences* which the soul possesses in preference to all the other creatures of God, and from the esteem in which it is held by those on whose judgment we may safely rely.

1. With regard to the excellences of the soul, we shall single out for our consideration three chief ones, which are of the highest dignity.

a. The first grand feature of the soul consists in its spiritual faculties of *understanding* and *free will*. The human soul is endowed with understanding; for, it possesses the power of thinking, that is, of forming ideas and judgments, and drawing conclusions from known truths. It is endowed with free will, as his own consciousness testifies to every individual. I am conscious to myself that I can choose at pleasure; that I may at will sit or stand, speak or be silent; that I may, at discretion, do or omit this or that action. The freedom of the human will is also attested by the judgment of the human race at large, who unite in asserting the necessity of legislation and authority; which, without the freedom of the human will, would be useless and absurd. The human soul is, therefore, gifted with the faculties of understanding and free will.

These faculties form the *noblest feature* of the soul, that feature which we commonly express by the word mind. It is mind that distinguishes man from the brute animal; that elevates him from the sphere of the visible to the invisible, from what is temporal to what is eternal. It is the mind which makes man like to God's angels, like to God Himself. And how magnifi-

cent are the achievements of the human mind! It is the source of all the great works of man. It is the inventor of all arts and sciences; the creator of all the master-pieces of architecture, painting, sculpture, music, poetry, and all the other arts. It descends into the bowels of the earth, and brings to light hidden treasures. It soars aloft to the heavenly bodies, weighs their masses, determines their course and swiftness, and measures their magnitude and distance. And whatever it has discovered or invented it yearns to communicate to the men of all ages and lands. In short, it is the mind of man which makes all nature and nature's forces subservient to him, and renders him lord of all God's creation. How great is, then, the value of the soul, which possesses such wonderful endowments!

b. The second grand prerogative of man's soul is its *immortality*. All other creatures are sooner or later separated into their component parts, and cease to exist. Not so the human soul. The majestic tree, for instance, decays, is reduced to its elements, and ceases to be a tree. Similar is the lot of the human body and of the irrational animal. The fuel is consumed by the fire and reduced to gases and ashes. And thus all material things return to their component substances, and are stript of their existence; but the soul remains the self-same. For what is not composed of different elements cannot be dissolved. But the soul is free from all composition. It is not, like the body, composed of various elements, but simple and spiritual, like the angels, like God Himself; and, therefore, by its very nature it is immortal and imperishable. What a marvellous feature! When heaven and earth, with all that they contain, shall have passed away and shall for thousands and millions of years be numbered with

the things that no longer exist, the soul shall still subsist in the same youth, vigor, and vitality, as it did in the moment of its creation; and so it will continue for all eternity. What can be compared, then, with the dignity of the human soul!

c. And to all these natural attributes of the soul is added a still infinitely higher prerogative, namely, its grand *supernatural end.* The body, and all things else, as the Christian doctrine teaches us, are created for the soul, as means for the attainment of its last end. But the soul is created for God. It is destined not only to be the friend and child of God, but to be one with God for all eternity; one with Him in knowledge and love, one in sentiment, one in will and desire, one in glory. It is destined to enter into the joys of its Lord, to take part in His glory and happiness; and that for eternity. What a sublime destination! Must not, therefore, the human soul, with such wondrous endowments, imperishable of its very nature, and destined for such a lofty supernatural end, be of inestimable dignity and worth? But the same conclusion follows from the testimony of those who are competent to judge of the value of our immortal souls.

2. On the true worth of the human soul we have the most unquestionable *authorities.*

a. The first in the line of witnesses in this all-important matter is assuredly Almighty *God* Himself, the Creator of our souls. How valuable in His eyes the human soul is, He has given us clearly to understand by the words: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" The most narrow meaning in which these words can be taken is that the possession of the whole world cannot make up for the loss of our soul; and that, conse-

quently, the soul is of greater value than the whole world with all its riches, and honors, and pleasures.

No less eloquently and clearly does God speak by *His works*. What has He not done for the soul? For its sake He has created the universe. And, in the first place, as regards the human body, the master-work of the visible creation, it has no other end than to serve the soul as an instrument for the service of God, and is, consequently, created for the soul. But everything else, in like manner, has been called into existence by God for the sake of the soul; for the destiny of the whole visible creation is to aid the soul in the attainment of its end. And as God has created all things for the benefit of the soul, so He preserves, directs, and governs all things for the sake of the soul; the irrational world by the laws of nature, and the rational, by His Divine Providence. All that takes place in the universe is either ordained or permitted by God for the sake of souls.

Nay, for our souls God has even gone so far as to *give Himself*. For, after man had forfeited his salvation by sin, and surrendered himself to the slavery of Satan, God sent His only-begotten Son, to redeem him from his abject captivity and restore him to his original destiny and dignity. To save thy soul, my dear friend, God became man and died on the cross. Review the life of Jesus Christ, from the crib to the cross, and you will, to some extent, realize what your soul has cost Almighty God, and what its true worth is in His eyes.

And yet, this is not all that God has done and still does for the soul of man. After redeeming it at such a high price, in order to make it partaker of the fruits of Redemption and preserve it from further ruin, He established His *Church*, in which He still continues His

work in behalf of the soul. He continues His saving work by means of His priests, His representatives on earth, to whose words He gives power and efficacy, whom He sends to all nations and to all climes, for the salvation of men. He continues His work by His seven *sacraments*, which He has made so many inexhaustible channels of grace. Most particularly does He continue His saving work in behalf of our souls in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, in which He Himself is present in person and unceasingly lavishes upon us His graces and favors. How great is, then, the worth of the soul in the eyes of Almighty God!

b. Hence the *saints* of God also prized the soul so highly. What have they not done and suffered to secure its salvation? Look at the sacrifices which they made for this end! How many of them, who had been brought up in all the luxuries and honors which wealth and high social standing could procure, have abandoned the world with all its riches and all its comforts for the retirement of the desert or the austerity of the cloister! And those saints who lived in the world—did they not divest themselves of all attachment to earthly goods, deny themselves, renounce their own will, and live for God and eternity alone? They lived in the world, but were not of the world. And the bands of apostles and apostolic men, who carried the Gospel of Christ to all nations; and the countless legions of martyrs, who watered the good seed, sown by the apostles, with their blood—what sacrifices have they not made for the sake of the soul?

c. Verily, the value of the soul is inestimable; it is great even in the eyes of the *devil*. Does he not show this plainly enough by the restless activity he displays often for many years to bring even one soul under his power? Whether we consider the intrinsic nature of

the soul and the natural and supernatural endowments with which God has enriched it, or review the evidence of the most unquestionable authorities, we must conclude that the soul is of priceless worth. Of what importance, then, must not the business of our salvation be, since the soul is of such infinite value! Is this work not incomparably more important than all other pursuits, the object of which is temporal and perishable gain? Is it not also the most necessary business of our lives?

II. NECESSITY.

The importance of any business, as I have said, depends upon its object; the necessity, upon its possible results. The more advantageous its results are, in case of success, and the more disastrous, in case of failure, the more necessary the enterprise becomes. The business of our salvation is, consequently, the most necessary of all undertakings, because of all enterprises its results, in case of success, are the most advantageous, and, in case of failure, the most disastrous. Let us consider its results in both cases.

1. In the first place, we must say that, if we *succeed* in this one undertaking, we shall be happy, and infinitely happy, though we should fail in every other enterprise, and thereby be thrown into the most abject poverty, the deepest dishonor, and saddest affliction. For if we succeed in this one business, all other *losses will be repaired*, and infinitely compensated. In the place of want will succeed infinite riches, in comparison with which all earthly pelf is but squalid poverty. God Himself, the sum and source of all good, will be our exceeding great reward. In the place of lowliness will succeed a glory in the splendor of which all earthly honors fade away. Then we shall be princes of the

court of heaven. In the place of toils and sufferings will succeed a bliss of which the Apostle says: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I. Cor. ii. 9).

If only this one business succeeds, *all is saved*—all that concerns us, all that is near and dear to us; the soul, the body, health, honor, wealth, peace, and joy are secured, and secured for good and forever. As long as God is God, we shall be free from all evils; as long as God is God, we shall enjoy the possession of all goods; as long as God is God, we shall be in an ocean of delight and happiness.

Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, is there any other business of which it may be truly said that by its successful issue all losses are repaired, all that is dear to us is saved, and all our interests secured forever? You will surely answer, that such there is none other. Should you not, then, be more concerned for the success of this business, than for the happy issue of any other? Should you not give infinitely more attention to the management of this business than to any other concern? However, it is not only the advantages of the successful management of the affair of our salvation that demand our greatest care, but most particularly the disastrous consequences of failure.

2. For, if we *fail* in the business of our salvation, disaster, unspeakable disaster, will be our lot, though all our other affairs should be successful to such a degree that we may revel in abundance of the goods, and the comforts, and the delights of this world. If we fail in this one enterprise, all our former *successes are of no avail.* Want and misery will take the place of wealth and comfort; not the misery with which we are but too familiar in this world, but unspeakable, eternal mis-

ery! Eternal reproach will take the place of earthly honors; eternal torments, which it baffles every sense of man to realize, will take the place of earthly pleasures and enjoyments.

If we fail in this business *all is lost*—all that is near and dear to us; soul and body, health and fortune, honor and pleasure, peace and bliss—all is lost, irrevocably lost! Oh, what a dreadful consciousness, what horrible remorse and despair shall be aroused in the soul, when it perceives that all is lost! Forever lost! Beloved brethren, when on a sea-voyage, which has been for many days prosperous and pleasant, and promised the happiest issue, all on a sudden a hurricane sweeps over the placid surface of the waters, strikes the vessel, rends the sails, breaks the main mast, as if it were a tiny reed; when the foaming waves dash upon the ship, pour down with the roar of thunder upon its deck, and at every instant threaten to engulf it, what terror seizes the hearts of the passengers! And if the hurricane redoubles its violence, and hurls the fragile craft upon a hidden rock, and the waters gush in torrents into the hold, driving all who had taken refuge there to the deck, to meet the raging element, what a howl of despair is raised by the unfortunate victims! What horror and confusion on all sides! See how the crew labor to stop the inroads of the deadly element! Without hesitation the cargo and baggage, be they ever so precious, are thrown overboard. The only concern of all is to save their lives. But if, despite their efforts, and the sacrifice of their possessions, the ship begins to sink, and the cry is heard, "All is lost!" who can describe the terror which possesses the victims? And yet, here there is question only of this temporal life, so short and so full of misery and affliction. What, then, must be the fright of the soul when,

immediately after death, it hears the sentence: "All is lost! Irretrievably lost! Forever lost!" Is there a business, therefore, of such moment and of such necessity as that of our eternal salvation?

How great is, then, the madness of the children of this world! The best amongst them conduct the business of their salvation, as if it were the least and last of all their duties. How remiss are they not in prayer! How rarely and how coldly do they approach the holy sacraments! How they shrink from every, even the least sacrifice! What would you say of one who thus managed his temporal affairs? Others, again, are not in the least concerned for their salvation, just as if they had no soul to save. Their only thought is of the present life; their only aim is to procure money, and honors, and pleasures. Others go even so far in their recklessness that their main endeavor seems to be to lose their souls, by thrusting themselves headlong into the greatest dangers of sin, loading sin upon sin, and even sacrilegiously abusing the holy sacraments for their still deeper damnation.

My dear friend, do you, perchance, belong to one of those classes? If so, should you not bewail your folly with bitter tears? Oh, then, let me beseech you, by the love you owe to your immortal soul, begin now, at least, to work out your salvation; and, despite your past thoughtless neglect, you will yet succeed in this momentous business; you will save your precious soul, and gain the everlasting life which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has purchased for you at the infinite price of His life's blood. Amen.

Third Sunday after Easter.

UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF EARTHLY GOODS.

"Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep; but the world shall rejoice."—John xvi. 20.

In these words our blessed Lord shows the distinctive difference between the ordinary lot of the children of God and the lot of the children of this world. The children of the world commonly find satisfaction in the enjoyment of the good things and pleasures of this world; the children of God, on the contrary, as a rule, lament and weep; must, in short, contend with all manner of privation and hardship. Such is the common, though not the universal lot of the children of God; for we know from experience that they, also, at times are blessed with abundance of temporal prosperity, and live a life of ease and comfort. That God is the author of this unequal division of temporal goods admits of little doubt, for, the Holy Ghost assures us, by the words of Ecclesiasticus, that "good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God" (Ecclus. xi. 14). Yet there are not a few who seem to overlook this fact. To some it seems inexplicable that the wicked, who deserve only the wrath of God, should in this world prosper. Others, again, take great scandal at the prosperity sometimes accorded to the good; since the Gospel teaches that sufferings and tribulations are of inestimable value, and a mark of God's predilection.

With a view to remove these difficulties, I purpose to-day to treat of the *unequal distribution of temporal goods*. My subject suggests an inquiry into the two

following questions, which also form a natural division of the matter under consideration.

1. Why does God grant to *the wicked* such an abundance of this world's goods?

2. Why does He sometimes bestow on *the good* similar blessings?

I. THE TEMPORAL BLESSINGS OF THE WICKED.

How comes it that God ordains or permits that the wicked thrive to such extent in this world; that theirs, in such lavish measure, is the possession of wealth, and power, and honors? How reconcile this fact with God's holy Providence? This arrangement by Almighty God, or permission by Him of temporal success in favor of the wicked, is justified by most important reasons. First, it reveals His mercy; secondly, it reveals His justice; and thirdly, the divine plan results in securing the advantage of His good and faithful servants.

1. His *mercy* is revealed by the very fact that He does bestow such blessings upon His *enemies* (for such certainly are the wicked); by the fact, also, that through such favors He seeks to *awaken their gratitude*, to gain their affections, and convert them to a true Christian life. Indeed, the sinner, blessed by God with temporal prosperity, must be lost to all sound reason and to all sense of gratitude, if he does not reflect and ask himself: Whence have I these temporal blessings? Have I been the sole author of them? This cannot be; for I came into the world poor and naked. My prosperity cannot be the fruit of my own industry and ability. For many just men, more industrious and far abler, do not meet with success proportioned to their merit. If I have inherited my wealth from parents, whence have they received it? and whence comes my having been born of wealthy parents? To

God must I attribute all my temporal prosperity. What love, what bounty has He shown me, a miserable wretch! What ingratitude, then, in me to lead so sinful a life, despite such love on the part of God! I must no longer remain ungrateful to Him, as I have hitherto been. I will change my life. I will henceforth shape the course of my life according to the holy will of God, and keep the commandments of my supreme benefactor.

By bestowing His temporal blessings on the wicked, God displays His mercy in another manner: He thus removes what might be to them an *occasion of many sins.* Many sinners, if they have not at hand the means of gratifying their evil inclinations, will give vent to their rage in horrid curses, blasphemies, and impious murmurings against God; or they may have recourse to dishonesty, to theft, or to robbery for procuring means of sinful gratification. Now, how does the God of mercy deal with sinners of this description? In many cases He masters them, as we are wont to subdue wild animals, by feeding them. To allay the immoderate cravings of their hearts, and awaken in them sentiments more in keeping with their human nature, He gives them the goods of this world, for which they crave, thus preserving them from a multitude of sins they would otherwise commit. True, if the sinner abandons not his sinful life, this merciful treatment of God towards him will but enhance his punishment and add fuel to the flames of that hell, which he is kindling for himself; yet this perversion is not in God's intention, which is purely an intention of mercy towards the sinner; but it is the fruit of the sinner's own malice and obstinacy.

2. Yet Almighty God reveals also His *justice* in His liberality towards the wicked. This He does chiefly in three ways.

a. He thus *rewards* that little good which they do. For, even the most wicked do some amount of good, for which God gives a temporal recompense. He cannot requite them in any other way. For, since the good which the wicked do is done in the state of grievous sin, it cannot be recompensed by a supernatural reward. Therefore God cannot reward it in the next life, and must, consequently, give some recompense for it here, in this present world. That was the reason, according to St. Augustine, why God gave such great political power to the ancient Romans. This was their reward for the stern, natural virtues which they practised.

b. God also, at times, manifests His justice by conferring on the wicked the temporal prosperity coveted by them, for their greater *punishment*. Let us take the instance of an avaricious man; he possesses sufficient means for his own and his family's honest and becoming support, yet he always craves for more and more, and tries by all means, without a consideration of their justice or injustice, to enrich himself. Is it any wonder that Almighty God sometimes punishes such an obstinate sinner by granting him the desires of his greedy heart, although foreseeing that compliance will eventually prove the occasion of his eternal damnation? May God preserve us from such a manifestation of divine justice, which is in reality the most terrible of all punishments!

c. Finally, Almighty God sometimes manifests His justice in another manner: He suffers the punishment of one sinner to be executed by *another's wickedness*. Let us suppose a man with a large fortune, gained by every kind of dishonesty and injustice. We will suppose him to experience no remorse of conscience, with no thought of reparation for the wrong committed. Now, God, in His justice, permits another, dishonest

like himself, to practise fraud against him, and rob him of his entire fortune. Also in this punishment Almighty God, not unmindful of His mercy even in His justice, tries with infinite love to draw good out of evil. His permission of this evil solicits the hardened sinner to enter into himself, to detest his dishonesty, and return once more to the practice of a just and upright Christian life. The very injustice which has caused his loss opens his eyes to see the enormity of his own dishonest practices, and to convince him of the peace to be found in a life according to God's law.

3. God often gives temporal prosperity to the wicked *for the benefit of the good.* For the temporal blessings which God commonly grants to the wicked are, in many cases, calculated to detach the hearts of His servants more and more from the goods of this world. To meet the thoughts which arise in view of the prosperity of the wicked in the hearts of His children, God seems to say: If temporal goods were of real value, would I bestow them so abundantly on the impure, on thieves, on swindlers, on drunkards, on blasphemers? Am I not wise and just? Have I not said that pearls must not be thrown to swine? Know, then, that I give those things to sinners, as one would give common bread and water to slaves; while for you the full inheritance of heaven, the fulness of all goods, is reserved for all eternity. Why should you, then, be so much concerned for the things of this world? Why should you encumber your journey to heaven with such useless burdens?

These are the chief reasons why God often allows the wicked to thrive in this world. They completely justify the Providence of God. It remains to see why Almighty God sometimes grants also to the good a large share of the blessings of this earth.

II. THE TEMPORAL BLESSINGS OF THE GOOD.

Why does God bestow such prosperity on some of His faithful servants?

1. To show *how great His love is* toward them, and how great is the *happiness* which He has in store for them in the next life. He does not deal thus with all His faithful friends; but it is because He foresees that worldly goods would not be for their true welfare. He loves those that are loyal to Him with an unspeakable love, and thus He plainly shows that He would readily do for all what He does only for some, if He foresaw that it would be for the salvation of all. A physician may have two patients in the same sick-room; for one he prescribes a bitter medicine, for the other a most delicious refreshment. If the former complains that he did not receive the same treatment as his companion, what will the physician answer? "Friend," he will say, "with all my heart I would have prescribed the same refreshments for you, did not your ailment require a different treatment; what is good for your fellow-patient is poison for you and would surely bring you to your grave." The difference of treatment arises from the physician's care and affection, which is equally great for both his patients. Now, this earth of ours is one great hospital; we are all patients; God is our physician, who knows exactly the nature of our ailments, and their remedies. If, therefore, He treats His infirm children in different ways; if He prescribes temporal prosperity for some, suffering and affliction for others; it still remains true that He loves all with the same fatherly love; for in His heavenly kingdom they all will share in the joys of the eternal banquet.

How great our happiness will be in heaven, we can, if not fully conceive, at least to some extent conclude

or *conjecture*, from the nature of temporal happiness. If God, here below, in this place of exile, shows Himself so bountiful, how great will be His bounty in our heavenly home, in His own eternal mansion? Most precious, therefore, are the spiritual fruits produced in our souls from considering those temporal blessings that God is sometimes pleased to bestow upon the good; for they manifest, on the one hand, the tender love which God cherishes for His children, and forcibly teach us, on the other hand, to wean our hearts from earthly things and turn them to things heavenly and eternal.

2. The second reason why God bestows the goods of this world on some of His faithful children is, that the *poor may find relief* and support. For, although God willed, for the greater security of their salvation, that there should be many poor, yet He does not wish them to be abandoned by the rich; else He would not have so often and so forcibly in Holy Writ urged upon the rich the duty of almsgiving to the poor. But, if the rich were all wicked, they would only think of themselves, and would leave the poor to their lot of misery. In His fatherly care for the poor, therefore, God ordained that among the rich there should also be the upright and charitable, in order that they, at least, might interest themselves in behalf of the poor, and might make loving provision for their wants.

Therefore, all you who possess abundance of the goods of this world, take heed that you *do not frustrate* the designs of Divine Providence! Forget not, that, as God has blessed you with temporal resources, on you rests the duty of sharing your means with the poor. If you neglect this you endanger your salvation, and will on the last day occupy no enviable place

before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, who will judge you according to the treatment you have rendered to His helpless poor. But if you are charitable to the poor, you will thereby lose nothing, but gain all; for God, who will not allow Himself to be surpassed in generosity, will bestow greater blessings on you.

Permit me to relate an *instance* of a friend of mine, who experienced the bounty of God towards those who are charitable to His poor. The son of poor parents, he rose by industry and ability, and particularly by the special blessing of God, to more than ordinary wealth. Instead of attaching his heart to the good things of this world, he gave thousands of dollars for charitable purposes, and took a most active part in all good works. Among other charities he constantly supported twelve, and sometimes even more poor students; he built two beautiful churches, and at least two convents, at his own expense. All this liberality did not in the least retard the increase of his fortune; but, as he himself assured me, his business thrived every day more and more. With what confidence may such a man, blessed with the goods of this world, which he has used for charitable purposes, look forward to the just judgment of God, in which he shall be called upon to "give an account of his stewardship" (Luke. xvi. 2).

3. Almighty God, moreover, blesses a certain number of His faithful friends with temporal prosperity, to *manifest His power*. He thus shows the possibility of reconciling two things, which seem next to incompatible, namely, riches and Christian virtue. It is not, indeed, unlawful for a Christian to possess extensive wealth; but it is very hard to combine virtue with wealth, difficult to save one's soul amid the many cares and temptations attendant on riches. Hence our Divine Lord Himself says that "it is easier for a camel

to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xix. 24). Would it not be a marvellous feat to bring a vessel under sail to a safe harbor with continual adverse winds? But the rich are forced ever to contend against adverse winds; for, though riches are commonly considered a favorable breeze, wafting us in the direction of happiness; and poverty an adverse wind, beating us ever back, the contrary is the real truth. Poverty is the favoring breeze, that swells the sails of the seafarer on the tempestuous ocean of this life, and speeds him to the tranquil haven of everlasting bliss; while riches is the contrary wind, which drives the mariner still further out on the raging sea, leaves him at the mercy of the surging billows, and ever and anon exposes him to imminent shipwreck. Since, therefore, the rich ever sail with adverse wind, it is extremely hard for them to gain the port of safety.

Therefore St. Augustine on the words of the Apostle, "I know both to abound and to suffer need," says: "It is no difficult matter to abound; any one may do so; but to *know how* to abound [i. e., to abound without sin] that is a thing which is given only to perfect and holy men." Hence, Holy Scripture gives such great praise to him who could have sinned, and yet has not sinned. For the poor man, possessing nothing, to live a moderate and temperate life is, though not without its merit in the eyes of God, nothing surpassingly extraordinary; but that the rich man, having at his disposal every means of gratifying his passions, should be temperate, and humble, and chaste, is considered something great and admirable; so much so, that the Wise Man exclaims, in astonishment at such a marvel: "Who is he, and we will praise him, for he hath done wonderful things in his life" (Ecclus. xxxi. 9). Such miracles of

grace Almighty God works, when He gives His faithful servants abundance of the good things of this world, and still preserves them in the path of virtue.

From what I have said, beloved brethren, you have doubtless perceived that earthly goods are in themselves of little value, since God bestows them not only on the good, who are His friends, but also on the wicked, who are His enemies; and on the latter to a much greater extent, than on the former. Hence, it evidently follows that you should not allow yourselves to be controlled by the greed of riches, nor suffer yourselves to be influenced in your temporal concerns by motives of avarice; but that you should manage your temporal affairs from the pure motive of discharging a duty, a stewardship, which Almighty God has entrusted to you. Follow this rule, and you will, on the one hand, avoid many sins, such as discontent, envy, jealousy, dishonesty; and, on the other hand, you will lay up rich treasures for eternity. In short, earthly goods will then not be an impediment to you in the way of salvation, but, on the contrary, they will smoothe the rugged path that leads to the blissful goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Easter.

THE WORKINGS OF DIVINE GRACE.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth."—John xvi. 13.

THE spirit of truth here referred to is the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. He is our teacher; but He teaches not by words. He imparts His instruction by enlightening our understanding and moving and strengthening our will. Such supernatural influence on our understanding and our will we call *actual grace*. It is, therefore, a special, actual grace which is here promised to the apostles; a grace by means of which they are to learn all truth, that is, they are not only to know the truth, but also love and practise it. Hence you will perceive how necessary is the assistance of divine grace. That you may also rightly appreciate its value, eagerly listen to its promptings, and follow its inspirations, I shall endeavor to show you its marvellous manner of operating in the soul. We shall see that, according to diverse circumstances, it works, now in a manner the most gentle and peaceful, now, reaching from end to end mightily, and disposing all things sweetly (Wisd. viii. 1), it works with a power and efficacy almost irresistible. The manifold workings of divine grace are strikingly illustrated in the beautiful passage of the Gospel (John iv.) which gives the familiar story of the conversion of the Samaritan woman. In this wonderful manifestation of God's grace we shall see—

1. *The gentleness with which it brings the sinner to penance;*

2. *The power and efficacy it displays in the sinner's conversion.*

I. THE GENTLE WORKING OF GRACE.

Divine grace adopts a gentle manner in leading the sinner to penance. It does not use violence with him, but drawing him gently, as it were, insinuates itself, and adapts itself to his circumstances and disposition.

1. It *waits* for him, often for years, with a patience and long-suffering truly divine. The Son of God, as the Gospel tells us, quite fatigued, once sat at Jacob's well, and waited. For what did He wait? For a poor, sinful woman, whose conversion He intended. And what is the cause of His fatigue? If we confine ourselves merely to the letter of the text, we must conclude that the cause of His fatigue was the hardships of the journey. But if, with the Holy Fathers of the Church, we penetrate deeper into the meaning, we immediately find that His fatigue had another hidden cause, namely, the patience with which He had so long borne with the disorderly and sinful life of this woman. This waiting, says St. Augustine, must have tired Him, though He was God, and must have almost exhausted His patience. Yet He does not betray impatience, but is resolved, despite her obstinacy, to wait to the last for this poor, hardened sinner.

Are there not, perhaps, amongst you, beloved brethren, habitual sinners who by their constant relapses are wearing out the patience of Almighty God? Oh! if such there be, let them reflect on the danger of their condition! For, though God waits for our conversion, and waits patiently, yet He waits but a certain time. If that time is once passed He waits no longer, and the sinner dies in his sins! How long Almighty God will wait for the return of the sinner, no one knows.

Every instant may be the last. How dreadful, then, is the danger of the sinner who, presuming on the long-suffering of God, perseveres in his sinful state!

2. Divine grace not only waits for the sinner, but also chooses a *fit moment* for his conversion, and even gives him a suitable occasion to be reconciled with God. Our blessed Lord, to confer His grace on this poor woman, chose a secluded place, where no interruption was to be feared, and just the time when she came to fetch water, when the fittest opportunity was offered Him of entering into conversation with her. Almighty God is generally wont to adopt this gentle and loving course in behalf of the sinner. There is hardly one of us who might not attribute his conversion to some such favorable circumstances; there is none but may remember that it was in some similar conjuncture that the grace of God opened his eyes. It is, therefore, of the highest importance that we do not let slip such occasions, when the grace of God is active within us, for it is no rare thing that one's eternal salvation depends upon such an occasion, according to the words of the Apostle: "In an accepted time have I heard thee; and in the day of salvation have I helped thee" (II. Cor. vi. 2).

3. A further proof of the sweet and gentle working of divine grace is the fact that it *prevents* us. Our blessed Lord not only waits for this sinful Samaritan woman, but He goes there to meet her; nor does He wait until she broaches the subject herself, but He addresses her and takes the first step. Thus God prevents all, even the greatest, sinners. He calls them to Him, when they do not take the least thought of Him, even when they show the greatest repugnance, and make the strongest resistance. Is that not the most wondrous love and mercy on the part of God?

But if He thus behaves so lovingly towards His outspoken enemies, what must be His conduct towards His friends! Should not this loving conduct of Almighty God inspire us with an unshaken confidence in His mercy? Should we not rather sacrifice everything than become untrue to such a loyal friend?

4. And how does the grace of God prevent us? Does it use coercion or violence? No; it comes to us *beseeching*, not commanding. Our dear Lord uses no force with that poor Samaritan woman; He does not constrain her to hear, or to believe Him, but He beseeches her. "Woman," He says, "believe me!" Nay, more, God asks little of us to make us a large return. What does Our Lord ask of this woman? Only little water: "Give Me to drink." And what does He promise her in return? Life-giving water, that flows into eternal life. "And he that shall drink of the water that I will give him," He says, "he shall not thirst forever." What does grace require of us? Often it requires but very little—a little more exactness in our daily prayers; a little more attention at Mass; a little more control of our tongue. Give Me this little, Almighty God asks us; but remember that on this little My greatest graces depend. In fact, such small sacrifices are often the beginning of the most striking conversions.

5. But, what shows the sweet working of divine grace still more forcibly is that, as St. Augustine aptly remarks, it accommodates itself to our dispositions, *suits itself to our character*, and even makes allowance for our weakness. This Samaritan woman was naturally talkative and curious, and would fondly hear from the mouth of the unknown prophet that the religious views and customs of her tribe were the true ones. Our Lord was indulgent to her; He did not

silence her at once; He knew that in this way He would not convert her, but rather repel and alienate her. He kindly entered into her questions, conversed with her on the most sublime truths, and gained her sympathy and confidence by His indulgence to her weakness. And does not the grace of God work in us in the same way, by suiting itself to our natural inclinations? If we are naturally inclined to an active life, grace impels us to the exercise of good works — works of charity. If we have naturally a tender and affectionate heart, grace inspires us with an intense love of God. If we are naturally sympathetic and warm in our affections, grace elevates this natural sympathy and attachment to the supernatural character of the virtue of brotherly love.

6. Grace never demands anything difficult or disagreeable of us without at the same time tempering it by some *agreeable element*. True, it asks us to despise the goods of this world; but only in as far as it makes us see their worthlessness: "He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever." True, it urges us to undertake great things for the honor of God; but only after it has filled us with admiration for His attributes, and for the rewards which He has promised to His servants: "O if thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that speaketh to thee!" True, it requires of us that we deny ourselves, and even hate ourselves; but not until it has impressed upon us the knowledge of our own sinfulness, and convinced us that self-abnegation is meet and just and absolutely necessary for us, and that we deserve nothing else in reality than contempt and hatred.

Thus sweetly and gently does God govern us with His grace. If an earthly sovereign would thus rule his subjects, how blessed would they not consider them-

selves! How great would be their love and affection towards him! How unshaken their loyalty! Such a loving lord and ruler is Almighty God. Judge, then, for yourselves, what you are to think of your past behavior towards so good a Sovereign. Yet, as sweet and gentle as is the working of divine grace in attracting the sinner, even so powerful and efficacious it is in the effects which it produces in the heart of the converted sinner.

II. THE POWERFUL WORKING OF DIVINE GRACE.

The power of grace is manifested in the victories which it obtains over the sinner in the moment of his conversion. With regard to this Samaritan woman, the grace of God obtained two wonderful victories over her—a victory *over her understanding*, and a victory *over her heart*—and this twofold victory it obtained in a manner no less wonderful.

1. Grace triumphed over her *understanding*. Her mind was benighted with a double shroud of darkness: the darkness of unbelief, and the darkness of error; for, as Origen assures us, the Samaritans, while they practised a kind of corrupt Jewish religion, worshipped the false gods of their heathen ancestors. How great a difficulty it is to convert one, especially a woman, who is entangled in such errors, needs no further explanation. It was, therefore, no easy task to bring this Samaritan woman from the obstinate pride of unbelief to the true humility of faith. Yet the grace of God in a very short time succeeded in this work. After our blessed Lord had brought her to acknowledge and condemn her errors, He gradually reveals to her the truth—who He is; that He is a prophet; that He is a teacher sent by God; that He is the great, the long expected prophet, Christ, the Saviour of the world. At the

same time, the grace of God infuses into her heart a great love for the Lord and Messias; and behold, that woman, who at first was disposed not to listen to Jesus Christ; that woman, to whom everything was hateful that came from the Jews; that woman, who, judging Christ only according to His outward appearance, believed Him to be a mere man—that same woman, now illumined by the light of grace, firmly believes and confesses that Jesus Christ is the true Messias, the Saviour of the world. This was the first victory of grace, the victory over the mind.

2. But grace triumphed also *over her heart*—a victory no less wonderful. This unfortunate woman was not only entangled in error and unbelief; but, besides, she had led a sinful and scandalous life. She had five husbands, we are told, and lived with a sixth, that was not hers. But among all vices, as is well known, there is none so hard to heal as the vice of impurity. Among all the evil spirits who take hold on the sinner's soul, there is none who makes such a desperate stand against the grace of God as the demon of impurity. And over this demon grace carried the victory. It would seem as if the grace of God had at once given a new heart to this woman—a heart, that was free not only from all impure lusts, but also from all worldly attachments and desires. She is no longer the wanton sinner of old; she is an entirely new creature; a generous soul, that at once enters on the path of virtue, and begins to spread the good odor of godliness. Nay, the grace of God gives her an apostolic heart, that yearns to communicate its happiness to others. She ran to the city, and announced to all the good fortune that had fallen to her lot. She invites all to come and see the Saviour; she leaves her pitcher behind, hastening into the city, and summons the inhabitants, crying: "Come and see

a man who has told me all things that ever I did. Is He not the Christ?" What a wondrous change, beloved brethren! What a miracle of grace! Must we not say, with the royal Prophet: "This is the change of the right hand of the Most High!" (Ps. lxxvi. 11.)

3. Those victories of grace, so wonderful in their results, are no less marvellous in the *manner* in which they have been obtained. Is it not marvellous that the grace of Jesus Christ should *in an instant* have worked these wonderful changes in this poor sinner? Is it not contrary to the ordinary laws of Divine Providence, according to which God is wont gradually, and almost inperceptibly, to lead men to sanctity? The Son of God spoke to her but the one word: "I am He;" and in that moment she is convinced, believes, glows with an enthusiastic love for Him, and becomes an apostle to her townsfolk. This one word of the Saviour, says St. Augustine, was more effectual than that by which God created heaven and earth; for the nothingness, which preceded the creation, could make no resistance to God, whereas sin is wont to withstand Him.

But what makes this conversion most marvellous is the fact that it was brought about *without a miracle*. In behalf of the Jews our blessed Lord worked miracles without number, with the greatest liberality; but in vain; the Jews persisted in their blindness and stubbornness. To this Samaritan sinner He only said: "The man, whom thou now hast, is not thy husband," in order to show her that He possessed supernatural knowledge. This was sufficient to extort from her the confession: "Lord, I see that thou art a prophet." Here Jesus Christ worked no other miracle than the conversion itself. It was His intention, in the case of this poor sinner, to display not only the sweetness, but also the power of His grace.

Let us, then, beloved brethren, put an unshaken trust in the grace of God, which, with all its sweetness, is so mighty and effectual. To this unbounded trust in divine grace I would particularly exhort *relapsing and habitual sinners,* who are in the same predicament, though, perhaps, not fallen so low as this poor Samaritan woman. If they only draw the grace of God from prayer and the sacraments, and put their whole trust in this grace, they shall soon be freed from their bonds. But you, my dear friends, whom God by His grace has raised from your sins, endeavor, according to the example of this poor Samaritan, to draw many sinners, especially those who would lead you again into sin, from the bondage of Satan. This is of all kinds of satisfaction the most pleasing to Almighty God, and it will be, at the same time, the surest pledge of your final perseverance and everlasting happiness. Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Easter.

WHY OUR PRAYERS ARE NOT ALWAYS HEARD.

"Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you."—John xvi. 23.

THESE consoling words which our Divine Lord addresses to His apostles, and in them to us all, contain the solution of a difficulty which is often moved in regard to prayer. This difficulty has a baneful effect on some Christians, as it weakens their confidence in prayer. I therefore undertook the task to-day of removing this misgiving from your minds. The cause of such misgiving is the fact that our prayers often remain unheard, which seems to contradict the repeated and explicit promises of Jesus Christ. The solution of the difficulty lies in the words of my text, "If you ask the Father anything in My name." According to these words, Christ does not absolutely assert that all our prayers shall be heard, but only that we will be heard as often as we ask the Father in His name.

Why, then, are our prayers so often not heard? The reason is: Because often *we do not ask in the name of Jesus.* We do not ask in the name of Jesus, our Saviour, and our prayers are, consequently, not heard in the following three cases—

1. *When we pray as unrepenting sinners.*
2. *When we ask what is not conducive to our salvation.*
3. *When we do not ask in a becoming way.*

I. WHEN WE ASK AS UNREPENTING SINNERS.

We pray not as sinners, but as penitent children, when we are sorry for our sins, and eagerly desire to be reconciled with our offended God and to obtain forgiveness of our sins; for, an humble and contrite heart, as the Psalmist assures us, God will not despise. As a sinner, in the strict sense of the word, prays only he who is an *impenitent sinner*. His prayer will not be heard, because he does not pray in the name of Jesus, the Saviour; and he cannot ask in the name of Jesus, because he is the Redeemer's downright enemy, and in nowise belongs to Him; he can, therefore, not ask the heavenly Father in the name, that is, through the merits of His beloved Son, the Mediator of our salvation. Or, if he should ask the heavenly Father in the name of His Divine Son, his words would be but an empty sound, which could claim no hearing in virtue of the promises of Christ.

This truth we find confirmed in *Holy Scripture*, for in the Book of Proverbs we read: "He that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination" (Prov. xxviii. 9). And again: "The Lord is far from the wicked, and He will hear the prayers of the just" (Ibid. xv. 29). Are not these threats most clear and forcible? And that Almighty God executes them; that, while He infallibly hears the prayers of the just, the impenitent sinner cries to Him in vain; Holy Writ affords us many striking proofs. The pious king Ezechias, for instance, prays, and fifteen years are added to his life; the wicked Antiochus prays, and yet he is eaten up alive by worms. Elias prays, and clouds are gathered on the firmament, and pour down upon the earth in refreshing rain; the sinful people pray, and not a cloud appears in the heavens, not a drop of rain falls in answer to their prayers.

So powerful is the prayer of the just, and so unavailing is that of the impenitent sinner. Yet, not thus fruitless is the prayer of the *repenting sinner*; for he thinks earnestly of his conversion to God, is in the fair way of being again adopted by God to the inheritance of His children; and, therefore, his prayer, far from being an abomination to God, is pleasing to Him; therefore, although he has no strict right to be heard, yet God in the excess of His goodness condescends to hear his prayers, particularly when they refer to the grace of a thorough conversion, and not seldom even when they are offered to obtain temporal favors. Thus neither the paralytic, nor the publican in the Gospel, nor the notorious king Manasses was excluded from being heard. Prayer, says St. Chrysostom, supplies the place of friendship; nay, it sometimes surpasses friendship. What friendship could not effect was brought about by prayer. One reason, therefore, why the prayers of many often remain unheard, is that they pray as impenitent sinners. Another cause, no less frequent, is, that what they ask for is injurious to their salvation; and, therefore, God in His goodness cannot grant their prayers.

II. WHEN WHAT WE ASK IS NOT CONDUCIVE TO OUR SALVATION.

When we pray for anything which is not conducive to our salvation, we cannot be heard; because then, too, we do not ask in the name of Jesus, our Redeemer. For in this holy name we can ask and obtain only those blessings which *Christ has merited* for us; consequently, those things only which are conducive to our eternal salvation. Besides, if our prayer should be pleasing to Almighty God and such as He can grant us, it must be *supernatural*, that is, it must have for its object

and aim, at least indirectly, the glory of God and our eternal salvation. This our blessed Lord Himself teaches us. We should thus pray, He says: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." He wishes us, 'tis true, to pray for our material daily bread and temporal prosperity; but only secondarily, and inasmuch as this is necessary, or, at least, not prejudicial to our eternal welfare. For, the petition for bodily sustenance, in the Lord's prayer, follows those that regard the glory of God and the salvation of our souls, and is restricted to that which is merely sufficient for the service of God, namely, our daily bread: "Give us this day our daily bread." The same rule we must observe in asking for other temporal blessings, according to the words of Our Lord, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all things else shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33). If, then, in praying for temporal blessings, we do not observe this rule, but ask for them without restriction, and independently of the glory of God and the good of our souls, we need not wonder if our prayers are not heard.

God seldom hears such a prayer, unless He is wroth and thus wishes to *punish* the rash petitioner. Thus He once heard the prayers of the Israelites when they turbulently cried for flesh to eat in the desert. Thus He heard them afterwards, when at their vain and foolish request He gave them a king. Thus He granted even the request of Satan, when he asked for the power to tempt Job; but the prayer of the Apostle, to be relieved from temptation, He refused to hear. Why so? Why, asks St. Augustine, did God refuse to hear the Apostle, while He granted the request of Satan? The reason was, answers the same holy Father, because

the refusal was for the benefit of the Apostle, while the granting of Satan's request was for his own greater confusion and torture.

If you attentively consider these truths and make the application to yourselves, you may easily perceive why your prayers so often remain unheard. For, what is it for which you generally ask Almighty God? It is commonly nothing else than what *regards this present life* — comfort in affliction, relief from distress, recovery from sickness, temporal prosperity, influence with your fellow-men; in short, all temporal blessings. And for these worldly things you ask *absolutely* and unconditionally, without considering whether they may be to your weal or woe. You pray somewhat after the manner of the wife of Zebedee, the mother of the apostles St. James and St. John. This fond mother thought, as did many of the Jews, that Christ would found an earthly kingdom, and asked Him, without the least regard to their eternal salvation, to give her two sons the first places in His realm: "Say, that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom" (Matt. xx. 21). Do you not pray in like manner? Need you wonder, then, that God, who loves you, and does not wish to punish you by granting your prayers, should give you the same answer He gave to this overzealous mother and her sons? "You know not what you ask (Ibid. 22). You pray for success and happiness in this life; but if your prayer is granted, I foresee that you will be miserable in the next life. You desire great riches; but I foresee that wealth would be the cause of your ruin, that it would plunge you into dissipation and vice. You wish me to deliver you from your affliction; but I foresee that it is necessary for your salvation: You know not what you ask.

You ask what is deadly poison for you, and murmur, because I withhold from you the fatal cup!" This is the second reason why our prayers are often not heard. But there is still a third case, no less common.

III. WHEN WE ASK IN AN UNBECOMING MANNER.

To ask the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, it is not enough to pray for what is conducive to our salvation; it is not enough to pray as the friends of Jesus Christ, united to Him by His grace, or at least by the earnest desire of serving Him: we must ask *as becomes the true friends of Jesus Christ;* our whole behavior in prayer must be such as to show that we belong to Jesus Christ, and ask in His name. We must, therefore, ask with humility, confidence, and perseverance.

1. First, I say that, if our prayers should be heard, we must, above all, pray with *humility*. For, if humility is in general the duty of a Christian, it is most especially so when he presents himself before Almighty God as a petitioner. This virtue must manifest itself in the external deportment of the body, as well as in the contriteness of the heart, though the latter is the more important, being the source from which all true external humility and compunction flow. If we thus pray with an humble and contrite heart, we are sure to be heard; for the Wise Man says expressly: "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds" (Ecclus. xxxv. 21).

But does it not often happen, beloved brethren, that in our prayers we are lamentably lacking in this so necessary virtue of humility? Are there not many amongst us who, even in the awful presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, assume a posture which is very unbecoming, if not irreverent? And how

stands it with the internal humility of the heart? Is it humility, when in prayer we abandon ourselves to all manner of wilful distractions? Is it humility, when we allow our eyes to wander unrestrained through the church, when we laugh and talk as if we were in the public streets? Is it humility, when we at once become impatient and murmur, in case our prayers are not heard. Does that show compunction, if we relax, and lose all relish for prayer, for the simple reason that God does not give us precisely the thing we ask for? Would we behave in such a way if we looked upon ourselves as what we really are in the eyes of God, poor, mendicant sinners, who can claim nothing but the mercy of God?

2. But with the deepest humility we must combine the firmest *confidence* in God's goodness and mercy. He who prays with little or no confidence in God shows that he either doubts the promises of Jesus Christ, or that he does not firmly believe in His faithfulness and power. But, in either case, he commits an outrage against God. How, then, can he hope to be heard? When, therefore, you pray for victory in temptation, for deliverance from or patience in affliction, for your daily bread in poverty and want; in short, for anything which is directly or indirectly for the glory of God and your eternal salvation; have an unshaken confidence that your prayers shall be heard, and that your hope shall not be confounded. Want of hope and confidence is often the cause why our prayers are not heard.

3. Finally, we must pray with *perseverance*, without faltering, without ceasing. Thus Our Lord teaches us (Luke xviii. 1) always to pray, and not to faint; that is, not to cease to pray, if we are not heard at once, but to persevere unflinchingly. It is precisely our persever-

ance which entitles us to be heard. But, if we fail to persevere, we thus show that we are deficient in humility and confidence, and our prayer remains ineffectual.

The fault is, therefore, always our own, if our prayers are not heard. This truth, certainly, is humiliating for us, but it is at the same time calculated to cheer and console us. For, if it is our own fault that our prayers are not always heard, it certainly is in our power always to be heard. We need only, in the manner explained, always pray in the name of Jesus. What a source of satisfaction and consolation for us! How happy would not be the poor mendicant the result of whose begging depended altogether on himself! Are we not exactly in the condition of such a privileged beggar? Therefore, beloved brethren, let us follow the directions of our blessed Lord; let us pray in His all-holy and all-powerful name; and our prayers shall at all times be infallibly heard, and shall bring us to that everlasting bliss which Jesus Christ has merited for us, and which He has made chiefly dependent upon humble, confident, and unceasing prayer in His most holy name. Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Easter.

HUMAN RESPECT.

"And you shall give testimony."—John xv. 27.

THESE words, beloved brethren, have been fulfilled in the case of the apostles. With what fearlessness they confessed the truth! The conversion of the whole world to Christianity is a striking proof of their fortitude. But we all are called upon to give testimony of the truth, not, indeed, by preaching the Gospel from the pulpit, but in our daily lives, by confessing our faith in word and deed. In order that we may give this testimony, and that the words of Our Lord may be realized also in us, we must, according to the example of the apostles, divest ourselves of all *human respect*. For, human respect is the chief cause why so many shrink from giving testimony to the truth, and outwardly lead lives which they themselves inwardly condemn. It is against this hateful weakness that I would warn you to-day; and I would exhort you, with all the force of which I am capable, to overcome this most dangerous and detestable obstacle of your salvation. And, in fact, the strongest motives urge us to contend with all our strength against this vice; for, to allow ourselves to be overcome by human respect is at the same time foolish, and shameful, and sinful. It is, therefore, the (1) *folly*, and the (2) *shamefulness*, and the (3) *sinfulness* of this contemptible weakness that I would successively lay before you.

I. FOLLY.

1. Human respect is a great folly. What do you think, beloved brethren, when you see a man strive with all earnestness and with all his energies after something which is utterly *unattainable?* Do you not judge, without any fear of rashness, that such a one is a downright fool? And justly so; for, no reasonable man would act in such a manner. But every one who allows himself to be controlled by human respect strives with all seriousness after what is absolutely unattainable. He strives to please the whole world, to please every individual with whom he comes in contact, to avoid the censure of his fellow-man. But who does not see that this is altogether impossible? Do what you may, you cannot satisfy all, you cannot escape censure. For, what pleases one, displeases another; what is praised by one, is blamed by another. How, then, can you please all? Even the same individual does not at all times judge in the same way; what he approves to-day he will perhaps condemn to-morrow. Therefore, no one has ever met with the approbation of all—not even our blessed Lord Himself, nor His forerunner, St. John the Baptist. For, as Our Saviour says, "John came neither eating nor drinking; and they say, he hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking; and they say: behold a man that is a glutton and a wine-drinker" (Matt. xi. 18, 19).

2. And *who are* those whose censure the slave of human respect so greatly fears, that he prefers to neglect the gravest duties of his religion rather than to incur their displeasure? They are, as a rule, men and women who are grossly ignorant in matters of religion. Their catechism they never learned, or if they did, they have long since forgotten it in the turmoil of worldly affairs. Commonly, they are proud, sensual,

corrupt, worldly characters; adversaries of Christ and His Church, and, therefore, outspoken enemies of those who lead a Christian life. For, whatever they may say, it is the wicked and unprincipled that hate the true Christian; because his Christian life and principles condemn their wickedness, and continually hold up a mirror to them, in which they necessarily behold the hideousness of their own sinful excesses. Does not the Wise Man say: "The wicked loathe them that are in the right way"? (Prov. xxix. 27.) I ask, then, beloved brethren, is it not the greatest folly to make even the least account of the praise or blame of such individuals? And is it not downright madness to allow one's self to be diverted from the path of duty by their unwarranted criticism? Does their blame, perchance, injure our character? Is it not the most honorable testimony which could be given of us? Those who are scoffed at, on account of their Christian lives and principles, stand high in the estimation not only of God and of all upright men, but even in the eyes of the scoffers themselves. For the unflinching courage with which they live up to their religious principles, despite all blame, and reproach, and ridicule, necessarily commands the respect and admiration of those very men who affect to despise them.

3. But, what crowns the folly of the slave of human respect is the fact that, by trying to evade the censure of the world, *he falls into the gravest censure.* For, instead of the undeserved blame of a few individuals, that would have been an honor to him, he incurs a threefold well-deserved reproach—the bitter reproach of his own conscience, by which he loses the peace of his soul; the well-merited reproach of all the good, who henceforth justly consider him a vile, double-faced dissembler; and even the just contempt of the children

of this world, who despise him as a dastard and a hypocrite. In short, his contemptible weakness drives him, as the proverb has it, out of the briers into the thorns. Human respect is, therefore, an inconceivable folly; but it is, moreover, a most shameful weakness.

II. SHAMEFULNESS.

1. In the first place, he who allows himself to be ruled by human respect is *unprincipled*. Unprincipled is he who does not live according to any fixed maxims or principles. Now, he who is guided by human respect has no principles. His life is governed, not by any fixed maxims, but according to the good pleasure and taste of those with whom he happens to come in contact. He speaks and acts just as he thinks it is pleasing to them; he, therefore, plays a double, and an exceedingly despicable part. With the pious and religious he is all piety and religion, so that the looker-on might take him for the best specimen of a fervent Christian. If he gets into the society of freethinkers, infidels, and scoffers at religion, he, too, is a freethinker, an infidel, a scoffer. In the company of the immoral and licentious, he shows himself quite at home in the vocabulary of revelry, debauchery, and blasphemy. Is not such unprincipled behavior truly vile and shameful? Can a man who is possessed, I will not say of any religious principles, but of even a remnant of honor and self-respect, act in such a contemptible manner?

2. He who is ruled by human respect is not only unprincipled; he is also a vile *coward*. For a soldier there is nothing more shameful than cowardice. And why? Because it is directly opposed to courage, which is the characteristic virtue of the soldier as such. Therefore, a cowardly soldier is branded with disgrace by

his fellows. But the Christian who allows himself to be controlled by human respect is a cowardly soldier. He is a soldier, because he has repeatedly sworn to fight under the banner of Jesus Christ; he is a cowardly soldier, because for fear of the enemy, for fear of the world, which he renounced, and which is the enemy of Jesus Christ, he has not the courage to do his duty, to fight the foe, but, coward that he is, lays down his arms. If an ordinary soldier, who shrinks from every danger, is justly considered a coward, what must we, then, say of the soldier of Jesus Christ who shirks his duty for fear of a mere groundless remark, or a piece of foolish criticism of some ignorant, stupid, or dissipated character? What must we say of the soldier of Christ who quails under the perverse judgment and stupid gossip of the world; who trembles at an impudent smile, or a shrug of the shoulders from one who is weaker and more cowardly than himself? Is such a one not a most contemptible craven?

3. Certainly, there is no viler coward than the man who allows himself to be swayed by human respect; but he is, moreover, a most contemptible *slave*. Not all those who pine in slavery are deserving of contempt. Those Christian slaves who at various times suffered the most cruel treatment with the most wonderful patience for Christ's sake, were certainly not contemptible. No, beloved brethren; a slave, who, under the hard pressure of his captivity, maintains the noble freedom of the soul is not deserving of contempt; such a one, though in chains, is a hero at heart, and deserves our highest admiration. What degrades man is not the slavery of the body, but the slavery of the soul, the slave-like spirit which is within him. This slave-like spirit is the sentiment of one whose ruling motive is vile fear. But such exactly is the

sentiment of the victim of human respect. It is not conviction, it is not conscientiousness, it is not sense of duty, it is not love or gratitude; nay, it is not even passion, but solely the vile sentiment of fear, that influences him, and disposes him for the commission of every crime, however enormous or degrading it may be. Can you imagine a more degraded slave? Hence we must conclude that human respect is no less shameful than foolish, since it displays an utter lack of character, the vilest cowardice, and the most degrading slavery. Such it must appear in the eyes of every noble-hearted human being. But what is it in the eyes of God? In the eyes of God it is a crying sin, an abominable vice.

III. SINFULNESS.

1. Hypocrisy is certainly one of the most detestable vices. The hypocrite is in the eyes of God an object of abomination, and in the eyes of men an object of contempt. Yet human respect is in many regards more condemnable. The hypocrite and the slave of human respect have this in common, that they both dissemble. But they differ in the manner. The hypocrite makes himself appear better than he is: he is ashamed to be wicked. The slave of human respect makes himself appear worse than he is: he is ashamed to be good. The hypocrite bears the semblance of good; and if we judge him by his outward appearance, we must say that he gives good example. The slave of human respect, on the other hand, makes a display of evil, and thus gives real *scandal*. If, then, our blessed Lord condemns those who do good, to be seen and observed by men, what condemnation have those to expect who do evil, to gain the approbation of men? Human respect is, therefore, in a certain true sense,

more damnable than the hateful sin of hypocrisy; because it is of its very nature connected with scandal.

And *how pernicious* this scandal is we have sufficient evidence in the universal ruin which it has already brought upon the world. It was human respect that brought the whole human race into misery. Had this vice not its share in the sin of our first parents? Was it not partly the fear to grieve his wife Eve that moved Adam to taste the forbidden fruit? Was it not human respect that brought such dreadful ruin on the Jewish people? Was it not the fear of the priests of the synagogue that deterred them from acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Messias? It was likewise human respect that prompted them, before the tribunal of Pilate, to raise that devilish cry: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And how many men, how many nations, has this vice since then brought to apostasy! How many conversions has it impeded! How many thousands would not fain return to the bosom of the Church, were it not for the dread of public opinion; or, what is one and the same, were it not for human respect! Human respect is, therefore, a grievous crime, because it is a sin fraught with the most baneful consequences.

2. But it is at the same time in itself a most *impious crime*. A single fact from the passion of Our Lord will make this plain to evidence. The Jews had resolved to put Jesus Christ to death. The Council, their spiritual tribunal, had condemned Him to death. But their sentence had still to be confirmed by the secular authority. They, therefore, brought Him before the tribunal of Pilate, and falsely accused Him of various crimes. But Pilate, who saw their motives, sought to dismiss our blessed Lord. He brought Him out before the people, bound with cords, dripping with blood, His head crowned with thorns; and he called out with a loud

voice: "Whom shall I release to you, Jesus or Barabbas?" But to his great dismay a general and unanimous shout was raised by the crowd: "Give us Barabbas! Away with Jesus! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Beloved brethren, you are indignant at the behavior of the Jews. How, you ask yourselves, how could they prefer the robber and murderer Barabbas to the Son of God! What a sacrilege! What an impiety! Very true; but is the same blasphemous scene not renewed, as often as there is question of choosing between God and the world—whether we should please God and displease the world, or please the world and displease God—and we, from human respect, choose to please the world and offend God? There is the choice between God and Barabbas, between God and the world, which Christ condemned! And the cowardly slave of human respect chooses the robber and murderer in preference to the sovereign Lord and Creator of heaven and earth, in preference to his loving Saviour and Redeemer! Oh, what an impious and sacrilegious crime is human respect!

Beware, then, beloved brethren, of this foolish, degrading, and sinful weakness. Beware of allowing yourselves to be influenced in matters of religion by the opinions of the world. Remember the heroism of those Christians who feared neither chains, nor tortures, nor the most cruel death which the malice of man could devise. They were men and Christians, like you. They had no other duties and no other means of salvation. The same grace which led them to victory is at your disposal as well. Remember the words of Jesus Christ: "He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when He shall come in the glory of His Father

with the holy angels" (Mark viii. 38). But "every one that shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32). Amen.

Second Sunday after Pentecost.

LOSS OF GRACE.

"I lay down My life for My sheep."—John x. 15.

CHRIST has kept this promise; He laid down His life for His sheep. He delivered Himself unto death for us and for our salvation, to secure for us His supernatural grace, and through grace eternal life. Hence we may perceive how dearly Jesus Christ has loved us, and, at the same time, what an inestimable treasure that *grace* is, which He has purchased for us at the cost of His life, and how careful we should be to preserve this priceless gift. For, if the Son of God did not hesitate to sacrifice His precious life, in order to gain for us this treasure, is it not meet that we should employ the greatest care to preserve it? It is this solicitude for the preservation of the grace of God in our hearts that I would particularly impress upon you to-day; and I consider this of the greatest importance just now, after you have complied with your Easter duty. By the holy sacraments you have established yourselves in the state of grace, and your chief task now is to persevere in the friendship of God.

There are chiefly two motives which should incite us to very great solicitude for the preservation of the grace of God in our hearts, and which I wish to put before you in the present discourse. These motives are the two facts—

1. *That there is nothing easier in this life than to lose the grace of God;*

2. *That there is no loss more serious than that of the grace of God.*

I. FACILITY OF THE LOSS OF GRACE.

For the loss of sanctifying grace one grievous sin is sufficient. Mortal sin, as you know, consists in the wilful violation of a commandment of God in an important matter. It is a rebellion on the part of man against his Creator and Lord; it severs the friendship between man and his Maker, and destroys sanctifying grace, in which the friendship of God consists. Now, there is nothing easier than to fall into grievous sin.

1. Are we not *of ourselves inclined to evil?* Is this not our sad and daily experience? Is there a day on which this deplorable truth is not forcibly brought home to us? The very fact of a thing being forbidden arouses our passion for it. And do we not find the same truth asserted in Holy Scripture? Do we not read there the express words of God addressed to Noe: "The imagination and thought of man's heart are prone to evil from his youth"? (Gen. viii. 21.) Since, therefore, the inclination to sin is inborn in us, and is often still heightened by the habit of sin, must we not confess that it is the easiest thing in the world to fall into sin, even into grievous sin?

2. To this our inborn inclination to sin, to this internal domestic enemy, are added numerous *external enemies*, who unite their efforts to work our downfall. And first among them is the common enemy of mankind—the *devil*, who goes about like a roaring lion to bring our souls under his power; who uses all occasions and circumstances; all means, whether of craft or violence, which an experience of six thousand years has taught him, to effect our spiritual and eternal ruin.

Side by side with the arch-enemy, the devil, in the

line of our enemies, stand his emissaries and helpmates, *men*, who readily lend their aid to him as instruments of seduction. These are, as it were, the bloodhounds, which the infuriated hunter of souls uses to track and run down the victims whom he has marked for destruction. These tools of Satan, in a certain sense, exercise a more baleful influence than the arch-fiend himself. For, having the same nature as ourselves, they make a deeper impression on us by their words and deeds. Besides, they have many means at their disposal which the devil has not.

And if we add to these numberless external enemies the various external *objects* which exert a sinful influence upon us, do we not find ourselves beset with dangers on all sides? For, according to the words of St. John: "All that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life" (I. John ii. 16). According to these words, all things may entail danger for us—not only what is evil in itself, but what is indifferent, what is lawful in itself, and even what is venerable and holy. Has not the house of God itself proved for many an occasion of offending God? To how many has the society of the most innocent and pure proved to be a snare of the evil one! In all circumstances, whether in the noise and bustle of the world, or in the most secluded retirement; whether in prosperity or adversity, at work er at rest; at all times and in all places, countless men have suffered shipwreck, and lost the grace of God. Our souls are, therefore, like a fortress which is not only surrounded on all sides by the most numerous and powerful enemies, but contains a traitor within its walls, who, at any moment, may open the gates and surrender it to the plunder of the beleaguering forces.

3. But what enhances the danger is the great *variety of the assaults* of our enemies. How various are the temptations which assail us! How many of our temptations are inevitable! Into how many do we fall without our doing! Is there a position in life, an age, or sex, or state, which is free from temptation? Is there any place, or any occupation, which can afford us perfect security? May not temptations assail us in the holiest places, and at the holiest occupations—even in the church, and at our prayers? And how many deceitful temptations come under the garb and pretext of good inspirations, that are not detected till after the sad fall into sin! How often does the evil one come under the guise of an angel of light! And how many temptations are so violent, or of such duration, that it requires a superhuman effort to overcome them!

And what powers have we to oppose against all those various assaults of our enemies? Nothing but our own weak forces. These natural forces of ours, 'tis true, are aided by grace, but we must remember that grace requires our co-operation. If grace should not prove ineffectual, if it should bring us to victory, we must, in union with it, fight the foe, make a brave stand against the temptation. How easily may it happen that one neglect this resistance, and, despite the grace of God, which is always forthcoming, allow himself to be overcome, and thus fall into grievous sin! Nay, alas, how often *does* this happen! This being the case, how great is the madness of so many lukewarm Christians who recklessly thrust themselves into the gravest dangers, give loose reins to their sinful inclinations, and are not at all concerned to secure the assistance of God's grace! Will they not by such behavior infallibly forfeit the inestimable treasure of grace? Yet

their rashness will appear much greater still when we consider what a grievous loss is that of God's grace.

II. GRAVITY OF THE LOSS OF GRACE.

No loss can be compared with the loss of grace, because it entails the loss of the greatest and most valuable goods.

1. He who loses the grace of God loses the supernatural *life of the soul.* The supernatural life of the soul is the life of Jesus Christ in us, our participation of His divine life. But this participation is possible only then when we are intimately united with Him, that is, when we are the members of His mystic body; and this intimate union is effected only by the charity of God, which is diffused in our hearts, that is, by sanctifying grace. As soon as we are stript of sanctifying grace, therefore, Christ ceases to live in us, we have no part in His divine life, and are, consequently, deprived of supernatural life—spiritually dead. As the wild grape-vine, unless it is ingrafted on the genuine vine, cannot produce genuine grapes, so we cannot produce true fruits of eternal life, that is, meritorious works, unless we are by sanctifying grace ingrafted on the true vine, which is Jesus Christ, our Lord. Hence the significant words of our blessed Lord: "I am the vine, you the branches; . . . without Me, you can do nothing" (John xv. 5). Without sanctifying grace, therefore, the soul is dead; dead, as regards its last end; dead for heaven.

Besides, with the loss of sanctifying grace is connected the loss of all those spiritual goods which go to make up, or accompany the supernatural life. The *friendship of God,* of our most powerful and loyal friend, is lost; the friendship of Him who is once to judge us, and on whom depends our lot for eternity.

The *freedom* of the children of God is lost; that freedom which gives us the mastery over our passions, over the world, over Satan. Can a man who is spiritually dead be master of his passions, and of the other enemies of his soul. Does the Scripture not say: "Whoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin" (John viii. 34) and, consequently, the slave of his passions, and the slave of Satan? And thus is lost, also, all peace of heart, and all true, inward happiness of man on earth.

All *merits* are lost. As man by his natural death loses all his earthly goods, so by the supernatural death of the soul he loses all the spiritual, supernatural goods which he had accumulated by his good works, performed while he was in the state of grace, according to the words of the prophet: "If the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity according to all the abominations which the wicked man useth to work, shall he live? All his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered" (Ezech. xviii. 24). The *sonship of God* and the *heirship* to everlasting happiness are lost. For, this is the right only of him who is the brother and joint-heir of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. But it is sanctifying grace which makes us the living members, the brothers and joint-heirs of Jesus Christ. All those precious gifts are lost with the grace of God. Can you, then, imagine a greater loss than that of God's grace?

2. But what makes this loss still heavier is the fact that it *can never be completely repaired.* You may say that one may be converted, and thus regain the grace of God. Very true; that is possible by the mercy of God; yet my assertion is also true; for, although one may be converted and re-instated in sanctifying grace, still the total loss will not and cannot be fully repaired. And why?

a. All the *good works* which have been performed in the state of sin are lost for the next life. Those works are like still-born children, works without merit; and as still-born children cannot by the ingenuity of man be restored to life, so those dead works can never be rendered meritorious. But may not one, after regaining sanctifying grace, perform the more good works, and thus repair all former losses? No, my dear friends, that is all an illusion; they shall not be repaired, for the reason that such reparation would be done with much more ease and efficacy by remaining in the state of grace. If you recover a lost capital after many years, it still remains true that you have forever lost the interest which it would have produced during that time, however profitably you may afterwards invest it.

b. A large number of *actual graces* have been irrevocably lost. The actual graces, by which God leads men to their salvation, form, as it were, a chain, inasmuch as each succeeding link of grace depends upon the use of the preceding one, and is commonly given after the former has taken effect. Now, when a man falls into a grievous sin, and thus the end for which actual grace has been given him has not only been frustrated, but the grace itself has been lost, the corresponding link in the chain of actual graces is lost, and the series is interrupted. Hence a very important grace, or a whole series of graces is irreparably lost, because the sinner, though he may be converted, is differently situated with regard to the supernatural guidance of God by the communication of His graces. And this, beloved brethren, is an incalculable loss, because the first series of graces, which God intended for one, is that which would lead one the surest and most efficacious way to his end. All those inestimable goods are, therefore, irremediably lost, even in the supposition that

the sinner returns again to Almighty God, and regains His grace and friendship.

3. But let me further ask you, beloved brethren, is the issue of such a favorable supposition so certain that you may safely count on it? Is it so sure that he who has lost the grace of God will again be converted and regain it? Is not, on the contrary, the supposition of the sinner's *conversion very uncertain*? True, every sinner *may* be converted, for God withholds from no one the grace necessary for conversion; but it by no means follows from this that the sinner *will* be converted. For, to this effect a special and efficacious grace is required. Will God give the sinner this efficacious grace? To this question I answer, with St. Alphonsus Liguori: God will grant it to him, if he confidently and perseveringly pray for it. But is it not very uncertain whether the sinner will do this, or not; and, therefore, likewise very uncertain whether he will obtain an efficacious grace and be converted, or not? Have there not been at all times sinners who counted on their future conversion, and yet have never been converted? Who can number the sinners whom death has surprised in their sins? And how many there are, who, after they have once fallen into sin, sink deeper and deeper, and never awake to better sentiments, till it is, alas, too late! May the same not happen to you, my dear friend; to you, above all, who have so often presumed on the mercy of God!

You see, then, beloved brethren, that by the loss of grace we not only lose the most valuable supernatural goods, but also jeopardize our eternal salvation. Guard, then, with all your energy against a calamity into which you may so easily fall, and which is fraught with such disastrous effects. Hold fast to the anchor of salvation; cling to the means of grace; pray without ceasing,

particularly in the hour of temptation; receive the holy sacraments frequently and regularly; but, above all, avoid the occasion of sin. Then the grace of God will be your constant companion; it will strengthen you in the temptations which you cannot avoid; it will lead you by a true Christian life and happy death to an eternity of unending bliss. Amen.

Third Sunday after Pentecost.

THE VIRTUE OF PENANCE.

"I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninty-nine just, who need not penance."—Luke xv. 7.

THE virtue of *penance*, to which the gospel of to-day directs our attention, is manifestly of the greatest importance in the economy of our salvation. It even possesses a certain pre-eminence over perseverance in holy innocence. This is evident from the words of Our Lord: "There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninty-nine just, who need not penance." For the angels, who behold the face of the Most High, can only rejoice at a real good. When, therefore, our blessed Lord says that they rejoice more at the penance of one sinner than at the innocence of many just, they must see in this virtue some excellence which innocence does not possess in the same degree. And this is truly the case, as I shall endeavor to show you in the present discourse. This pre-eminence consists in the fact that by penance Almighty God is, in a certain true sense, more glorified than by innocence; since by penance His mercy and His justice are most conspicuously shown forth—His mercy, by the return of the sinner, and His justice, by the sinner's atonement. For the virtue of penance consists in these two acts of the sinner: his return to Almighty God, and his atonement, or satisfaction to the divine justice for the sins committed. The two points, therefore, for which I ask your attention are—

1. *The return of the penitent sinner is a grand manifestation of God's mercy;*
2. *The satisfaction of the sinner is a no less striking evidence of God's justice.*

I. A MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S MERCY.

The first step on the way of penance, as I have said, is the inward change of sentiment, the sorrow for sin, the return to God; and this first step displays the mercy of God in the most striking way. If we attentively consider to-day's gospel, we find in the return of the sinner to God a threefold manifestation of divine mercy: God seeks the sinner; He really finds him; and He brings him back to the household of His children. All this the good shepherd does towards the lost sheep; but by the good shepherd is understood our blessed Lord, and by the lost sheep the sinner.

1. God *seeks* the sinner, and thus gives the most striking evidence of His mercy. The sinner who has strayed from God is in the most deplorable condition. He has abandoned the flock, separated himself from the good, excluded himself from the number of the just and the children of God. By his faith and baptism he may still belong to the Church; but as charity, which consists in sanctifying grace, is wanting to him, the inward bond, which unites the members of the Church with one another, as far as he is concerned, is broken, and his union with the Church is only an external one. How sad this condition is you may easily perceive from the following considerations.

First, the sinner who has strayed from God is deprived of the necessary *spiritual nourishment* of the soul. The use of the Holy Eucharist, this heavenly food, which the merciful Shepherd has prepared for His sheep, is interdicted him. Or, if he should be so

rash as to approach this celestial banquet in the state of sin, in that case it is not for him a life-giving food, but death-bearing poison.

Secondly, the sinner is *spiritually dead;* for he is stript of inward charity, sanctifying grace, which is the life of the soul, in which consists the living union with Jesus Christ, that makes us living members of His mystic body. He is no longer in union with the soul of the Church of Christ, is only a dead limb on the mystic body of Christ, and is, consequently, deprived of all supernatural life.

But the third and most doleful feature of the sinner's sad condition is the utter *separation from God.* This woful separation from God is a prelude and foretaste of the miserable state of the damned in hell. Do not think, beloved brethren, that the sufferings of hell consist essentially in the positive tortures inflicted on the damned. That is not true; they consist essentially in the separation from God; in other words, in the continued state of sin. Thus Holy Scripture teaches us; for, what is hell according to the teaching of Scripture? It is, as we read in the book of Job, "a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth" (Job x. 22). Hence it is disorder, and horror, and confusion, which constitute the essence of hell. But this inward disorder in man consists not in the punishment of sin, but in the state or guilt of sin itself. This disorder cannot consist in the punishment, as St. Augustine remarks, because order imperatively demands the just punishment of sin; and punishment is, therefore, the most perfect order. The disorder consists in the sin itself, because sin is a state of rebellion against God, and apostasy from God, which is in itself the greatest subversion of order. The sinner, therefore, may well exclaim with the

Psalmist: "I am counted with them that go down to the pit; . . . they have laid me in the lower pit, in the dark places, and in the shadow of death" (Ps. lxxxvii. 5, 7). And if he is once relieved from his sin, he may joyfully cry out with David: "Thy mercy is great towards me; and Thou hast delivered my soul out of the lower hell" (Ibid. lxxxv. 13). Poor, wretched sinner, thou bearest a very hell in thy bosom, and though thou hast not yet been consigned to the torments of the damned, thou art, of thyself, as impotent to escape them, as are those who are actually burning in the flames of hell.

Is that not a most wretched condition, beloved brethren? How great is, therefore, the mercy of God, who seeks the sinner in this lamentable state, in the midst of that darkness and horror in which he is languishing, and sheds the light of His divine inspirations on his benighted soul! What incomprehensible mercy on the part of God thus lovingly to visit one who is His pronounced enemy, who has heaped such outrages upon Him, and has not the slightest remorse for his sinful doings!

2. But God not only seeks the sinner; He also *finds* him, that is, He really changes his heart; and this is the second proof of His mercy. When we consider the wretched state of the sinner, we should be induced to think the sight of the benign Shepherd, who has so patiently searched for him, to bring him back to the fold of His elect, should fill his heart with joy and gratitude, and make him desirous of returning and faithfully following his kind Master. Yet, strange to say, this is not the case. The man who has once strayed from God and lost himself on the paths of sin recoils and shrinks back with terror at the approach of the Good Shepherd. Like a patient who loathes the best

food, he has lost all relish for heavenly goods. If spiritual refreshment is offered to him, he rejects it. Thus the sinner flees from the Good Shepherd, when He approaches him, and offers to lead him back to the salutary pasture. I ask you, sinner, is this not your own experience? Do you not daily flee from the approach of the loving Shepherd of your soul? Do you not, perhaps, shrink from His grasp at this moment? Does not God, perhaps at this very instant, urge you to restore the ill-gotten goods you possess, to abandon your dissolute habits, to banish envy, hatred, revenge, impure love, the sources of so many sins, from your heart? And do you not answer Him: no; not yet? You defer your return to God from day to day. But what is this else but to flee from the Good Shepherd and reject His mercy? How great, then, is the mercy of God, who, despite the obstinacy of the sinner, does not cease until He has finally changed his wayward heart by His divine grace, made him obedient to His holy inspirations, and brought him back to a virtuous life!

3. But God's infinite mercy goes still farther in behalf of the unfortunate sinner. The Good Shepherd does not cease until He has *borne him back* to the fold on His own shoulders. If the sinner has finally determined to abandon his sin and return again to the path of virtue, the power to do so is still wanting to him. The unhealthy nourishment on which he has fed; the riches, honors, and pleasures, with which he has satisfied the cravings of his appetite, have spiritually so weakened him that he has no longer the strength to enter upon and pursue the arduous path of salvation. Here the merciful Shepherd has pity on him, raises him upon His own shoulders, and bears him back to the salutary pasture from which he has strayed; in other words, He gives him such strength, that he easily overcomes,

and is hardly conscious of the hardships of the journey. Have not many of you, beloved brethren, experienced the effects of this wonderful mercy of God? How easy did it not become for you to return to God, after you had once taken the generous resolve to do so! What spiritual joy and consolation then filled your heart! How trifling did all difficulties and obstacles then appear to you!

The return of the sinner to God in penance is, therefore, altogether a work of divine mercy. It is the all-merciful God that begins it, by seeking the sinner and enlightening him with His holy inspirations; it is the all-merciful God who continues it, by transforming the sinner's heart and filling it with salutary sorrow for his sins; it is the all-merciful God that brings it to a happy issue, by granting the sinner the grace of perseverance. The sinner's return to God is, therefore, the grandest manifestation of God's mercy. That the satisfaction for sin, which is the second element of Christian penance, is a no less striking evidence of the justice of God, will appear from the second point of our consideration.

II. AN EVIDENCE OF GOD'S JUSTICE.

The second step on the way of penance is *satisfaction*, or atonement. Atonement is an essential part of that penance, which, according to the infallible testimony of Our Lord, gives joy to the angels. To do penance evidently means what St. John the Baptist signifies by the words: "Bring forth fruit worthy of penance" (Matt. iii. 8). Now, these worthy fruits of penance, according to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers and divines of the Church, consist in the punishments or austerities which we inflict upon ourselves to atone for the offences committed against God. And to this atone-

ment Almighty God exhorts us by the words of His prophet Joel: "Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning" (Joel ii. 12). Satisfaction is, therefore, a *necessary element* of penance. This supposed, I maintain that, as the return of the sinner to God glorifies the divine mercy, so the satisfaction made by the sinner through penitential works shows forth the divine justice; for, as the return of the sinner to God is the effect of divine mercy, so satisfaction is the effect of divine justice.

It is the *justice of God* which *impels* the sinner to inflict upon himself punishment for his sins, and thus make atonement to God. To make this truth clear to yourselves, picture to yourselves a poor sinner, seized with sorrow at the enormity of his sins. He sees the all-just and all-powerful hand of God armed against him, and thinks with terror of the just and dreadful chastisement that hangs over him. How doleful, how disconsolate is his situation! It is like that of a poor criminal, who is sentenced to death. In this distress faith comes to the aid of the wretched sinner and shows him a means to escape the dread disaster. Faith reminds him of the words of the Apostle, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (I. Cor. xi. 31), and speaks to his penitent heart: be of good cheer! Let justice make atonement to justice! God will judge thee; therefore judge thyself. God will punish thee; therefore punish thyself. God, though infinitely just, will mercifully accept the punishment which, with an humble and contrite heart, thou imposest upon thyself as an atonement for thy sins, however disproportioned thy penitential works may be to the number and gravity of thy sins. Thus judge thyself, that thou mayest not be judged.

Now the sinner takes courage, and seeing that he cannot evade the divine justice, and that there is no other means to appease it but by self-inflicted punishment, he cheerfully *resolves to execute justice upon himself*, and thus to anticipate the divine judgment. He himself, as it were, takes the place of the supreme and all-just Judge; and as the eternal Judge brings the sinner before His tribunal, declares him guilty, and pronounces the sentence of punishment, so now the sinner presents himself before the tribunal of the Most High, accuses himself in confession, declares himself guilty by his contrition, and inflicts punishment upon himself by accepting the penance and other injunctions imposed upon him. Hence you see that it is the justice of God that impels the sinner to make satisfaction for his sins; and, at the same time, how necessary it is thus to disarm, so to say, the divine justice, and to punish ourselves by penitential works, if we would escape the future, infinitely greater punishments, which our sins deserve. Be not satisfied, then, beloved brethren, with the paltry penance which the priest imposes on you in the Sacrament of Confession, but add voluntary works of atonement, that you may bring forth worthy fruits of penance.

To conclude, let us cast a glance at that wonderful scene which for the angels themselves is a worthy object of rejoicing. The sinner accuses himself, and behold, God ceases to accuse him. The sinner becomes to himself the minister of justice, and the infinite justice of God is changed into clemency. God forgives the sinner, because the sinner is unwilling to forgive himself; because he desires justice, he receives mercy. Should this consideration not animate us with great esteem for, and unshaken confidence in the holy Sacrament of Penance—this tribunal of mercy, which so

glorifies God in His grandest attributes? Let us, then, beloved brethren, frequently approach this holy Sacrament, in which the virtue of penance is practically and fruitfully exercised; let us approach it with the proper disposition, in the true spirit of penance; and when we shall come to stand before the judgment-seat of God, mercy will take the place of justice, and the tears and sighs of our penance will be changed into endless rejoicing in the kingdom of God's glory. Amen.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost.

GOOD INTENTION

"Master, we have labored all the night and have taken nothing." —Luke v. 5.

THERE are, alas! many Christians, who, after they have labored, not for a whole night, like the disciples of Our Lord, but their whole lives long, are found at the end of their days with empty hands; for all that is not done for the honor of God has no value for eternity, and vanishes like smoke. And are there not many Christians who toil day and night, not having the honor of God, but only temporal ends in view? To this class belong not only those who lead a sinful life, but also many others, who are considered good Christians, but do everything merely from worldly motives and for temporal gain. I shall, therefore, make use of the occasion which the gospel of to-day offers, to put you on your guard against such a misfortune, and to exhort you henceforth to cast your nets in the holy name of Jesus, that is, to have a *good intention* in all you do. For this end I will show you—

1. *The necessity of a good intention;*
2. *The advantages to be derived from a good intention.*

I. NECESSITY.

By intention we here understand the motive from which an action is performed. We may be said, therefore, to have a good or a bad intention in an action, according as the motive is good or bad. If, for instance, one acts from the motive of avarice, ambition, or lust,

his intention is not a good, but a sinful one. If, on the other hand, we are actuated by the love or fear of God, our motive is good, namely, the honor of God and our own salvation; and, consequently, our intention is not only good, but, what is of more importance, and what is here in question, supernaturally good. But such a supernaturally good intention is necessary, because God, both as Creator and Redeemer, has made such a supernatural intention an imperative duty for us.

1. As *Creator* God must require our service; for, if God, who from all eternity is the sum and source of all happiness, has created us in time, He did so, not to add to His own beatitude—which is impossible—but to make us partakers of His own infinite bliss. But as the infinite love which God of necessity bears to Himself necessitates Him to do all that He does for His own glory, He must needs make our participation in His happiness dependent on our service. In other words, if He would create us, He could not but create us for His service, and could not but exact this tribute from us. But do we serve Him properly if we seldom or never think of Him? Do we serve Him if we toil the livelong day, not to do His will, not to save our souls—for this above all other things is His divine will—but only to please ourselves, to gratify our own ambitious, grasping, and sensual passions? In that case we would serve God as little as your domestics would serve you, if they labored the whole day for themselves alone.

As our Creator God is, moreover, our *lord and master;* for whatever we are, and whatever we possess: our very existence, the faculties of body and soul, all our natural endowments and talents, are His free gift. We are, therefore, His property. This being the case, must we not look upon all our inward and outward actions; on our thoughts, words and deeds, as belonging

by the strictest right to Him? For whom does the tree or the field bear its fruit? Is it not for its master, its proprietor? But our actions, internal as well as external, are the fruits we bear. Do they not, therefore, belong to God, our lord and master? And is it not, then, a duty of the strictest justice that we perform all our actions for Him, for His honor and service, that is, with a good intention?

As our Creator He has, finally, in order to remove every doubt, indelibly engraven on our hearts the *law*, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength" (Deut. vi. 5). Now, what can that mean: to love God with all our strength, with all the forces of body and soul? It can have no other meaning than that we should do all our actions from the motive of the love of God, or, what comes to the same, with a good intention. God the Creator, therefore, has made it a bounden duty for us to perform our actions with a good intention.

2. Still more forcibly does God as our *Redeemer* insist upon the necessity of a good intention in our actions. As our Redeemer He is our teacher, whom we are to hear, and our model, whom we are to imitate. Now, in the first place, what does he *teach* us in regard to the good intention. In the Sermon on the Mount, which St. Matthew, the Evangelist, has preserved us, He gives us very detailed instructions on the necessity of a good intention. Take heed, He says, that you do not your justice before men, that you may be seen by them. Therefore, when thou doest an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. But when thou givest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth; and thy

Father in heaven, who seeth in secret, will repay thee. And when you pray, be not as the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. But go into thy chamber, and having closed the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will reward you (Matt. vi. 1–6). And in a similar way He speaks of fasting. Is it not plain, then, that our blessed Lord lays the greatest stress upon the necessity of a good intention in all our actions?

And His *example* is no less eloquent on this subject. In all His wondrous works, as He Himself declares in the Gospel of St. John, He had nothing else in view than the glory of His heavenly Father. "I do always the things that please Him" (John. viii. 29.), He says. And again: "I seek not My own glory; there is one who seeketh and judgeth" (Ibid. 50). "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work, which Thou gavest me to do" (John xvii. 4).

It is, therefore, certain beyond a doubt that God, both as our Creator and as our Redeemer, has imposed upon us the strictest obligation to do all our works with a good intention. But this strict duty cannot but be, at the same time, most agreeable to us, when we consider the advantages which accrue to us from its faithful fulfilment.

II. ADVANTAGES.

By the practice of a good intention we reap those two advantages which are of the highest value in the estimation of men: namely, true greatness and riches.

1. The good intention, first of all, makes us great in the eyes of God; therefore, truly great. For the true *greatness* of man consists in his likeness to God, who is greatness itself. The more any one bears this like-

ness of God in his soul, the greater he is. But the good intention renders us like to Almighty God, both in our works and our sentiments.

The good intention conforms us with God, in *our works*; because by it we have the same end in view in all our actions which Almighty God Himself has in all His works, that is, His own honor and glory. The whole work of creation, the whole universe, with all that it contains, has no other end than to proclaim to us the greatness and majesty of the Creator; in other words, to glorify Him. And we, as long as we have a good intention in our actions, have the very same object in view; for, when we perform our works with a good intention, we constantly labor for the glory of God, we co-operate with God to one and the same end, and do the same in our own little sphere, as far as depends on us, as Almighty God does in all His great and wonderful works. Is that not a true imitation of God our Creator? Is that not true greatness? How little, on the other hand, how contemptible, is the man who is actuated only by selfish and temporal motives! He seeks not God, but his own insignificant self! Not what is heavenly, but the vile things of this earth! However grand his deeds may appear in the eyes of men, in the eyes of God, who sees his motives, he is vile and contemptible, a despicable slave of selfishness.

But the good intention, further, makes us like to God in *sentiment*. By the good intention we make the sentiments of God our own; we judge of things as God judges of them; we esteem what God esteems, and despise what God despises; we love what He loves, and hate what He hates. By the constant practice of a good intention the cause is removed which commonly makes our sentiments conflict with those of Almighty God, namely, our selfishness, or immoderate self-love.

It is self-love which perverts our judgment, which sways our minds according to the false maxims of the world, makes us love and covet what we should detest and abhor, and hate and fear what we should love and embrace. But the constant practice of a good intention is the death of self-love; for, if we always act from higher motives, always endeavor to please God in all our actions, always deny our own will and seek only the will of God, our self-love will evidently be gradually extinguished, and our thoughts and desires will be conformed with the all-wise designs and all-holy will of God.

Who does not see, then, that the good intention renders us like to our Creator, both in our actions and in our sentiments, and thus makes us truly great in the eyes of God? And this, beloved brethren, is a very *consoling thought* for us; for we have all an inborn desire to be truly great—an ambition which is good in itself. Therefore the thought of attaining to true greatness has such a powerful influence upon our conduct. On the other hand, we are often in circumstances which seem to debar us from the performance of any great achievements. How many are there amongst us who have the opportunity of doing things that attract the public gaze, and arouse the admiration of our fellow-men? But how amply are we compensated by the fact that in our own inglorious sphere we may, notwithstanding, be truly great, nay, even far surpass in greatness all the reputed great ones of this earth! Employ, then, with diligence this infallible means of true greatness, and you shall be truly great, if not in the eyes of men, surely in the eyes of God and His angels, who are the infallible judges of true greatness. Thus you will, moreover, amass an inexhaustible treasure of true riches, which is the second advantage to be

reaped from the faithful practice of a good intention.

2. True *riches* consist not in the possession of earthly goods, which have never succeeded in making a man truly happy, but in a treasure of merits, which yield imperishable goods, and render man perfectly and forever happy. Now, the good intention opens such a treasure for us; for every action, be it ever so trifling and insignificant, which we perform with a good intention, merits for us a higher grade of eternal happiness. A cup of cold water, given to the thirsty, is certainly no great deed. And yet our blessed Lord assures us that this trifling act, if done with a good intention, will have its eternal reward (Matt. x. 42). And is this not, again, a most consoling truth for us, who, as a rule, have little opportunity of doing great works in the service of God? Does this not show us plainly that in the most ordinary circumstances of life we may lay up a boundless treasure of merits for eternity? In fact, beloved brethren, if you perform your daily duties, be they ever so unpretending, with a good intention, you may at the end of your lives possess a treasure which will far outstrip the wealth of kings and princes, and even the riches of all this universe.

Seeing, therefore, that it is a duty imposed upon us by God, our Creator and our Redeemer, but that it is, at the same time, a duty the performance of which is connected with the greatest spiritual advantages, should we not make it a point in future carefully to cultivate this salutary practice of the good intention in all our actions? Besides, we must bear in mind that this practice is extremely *easy* for all those who are of good will. For, besides the state of grace, without which man is incapable of merit, nothing is needed but to make the good intention, that is, to offer up the va-

rious actions of the day for the honor and glory of God, in union with the intentions of the divine Heart of Jesus, at the beginning of each day. It is advisable, however, to renew the good intention during the day, especially at the beginning of every important work, or from time to time in the course of our daily routine of business. Are these not easy conditions, to amass such inestimable supernatural riches! Let us, then, bestow all due attention upon this wholesome and useful practice, and when the hour of death shall come, we shall not be found with empty hands, but with boundless treasures, which will purchase for us a crown of glory that will never fade. Amen.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

THE HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.

"Then come and offer thy gift."—Matt. v. 24.

ACCORDING to the prescription of the law, the Jews were obliged twice every day, morning and night, to offer sacrifice to the living God. Their sacrifices were of the most various kinds, consisting of animals and other material objects, that were destroyed or consumed in acknowledgment of the sovereign majesty of God and their total dependence on Him. These sacrifices and gifts have been abolished by Jesus Christ, and in their place has been established a sacrifice infinitely more perfect and more pleasing to Almighty God—the adorable *Sacrifice of the Mass*. If, then, the Jews were bound by law to offer daily a double sacrifice, how much more solicitous should we be, as often as our circumstances permit during the week, or at least on Sundays and holy-days of obligation, when we are strictly bound to do so, devoutly to assist at holy Mass?

Now, whence comes it that so many Christians are so indifferent in this matter as either wholly to neglect this sacred duty of hearing Mass, or to perform it only with reluctance and without due reverence and devotion? The chief reason, it seems to me, is that they have no true idea of the value of this holy sacrifice, and, consequently, no just appreciation of it. In order to remove the cause of this baleful indifference, and to inspire you with love and esteem for the holy sacrifice of the Mass, I shall endeavor to show you what in-

finite treasures it contains. These treasures are boundless—

1. Because the holy sacrifice of the Mass is the *most perfect act of divine worship.*

2. Because it is an *inexhaustible fountain of grace.*

These two points shall form the subject of our consideration.

I. THE MOST PERFECT ACT OF DIVINE WORSHIP.

1. God is honored and glorified by every good work, but of all acts of divine worship, sacrifice, taken in its strict sense, is the most perfect. For, what is a sacrifice in the proper and strict sense of the word? It is the offering of a visible object to God by its destruction, annihilation, or similar change, in acknowledgment of His supreme dominion, and of man's total submission to Him. It is, therefore, an external symbolic action, visibly representing God's sovereign majesty and man's total dependence upon Him.

The object which is offered, or the *victim*, must be appropriate to the end for which the sacrifice is offered; and since the end is the acknowledgment of the infinite majesty of God, and is therefore infinitely sublime, it is meet that the victim should be the noblest, the best in God's visible creation, that is, human life itself. Therefore Christ, who offered the most perfect sacrifice, gave His life on the cross. Besides this one Almighty God neither demanded nor permitted the sacrifice of human life. He was satisfied, instead, with the offering of visible creatures figuratively representing human life. Therefore He instituted as victims animals and other things, that were destined for the support of man, and, consequently, stood in intimate relation with human life, and naturally symbolized it.

Not every offering of such an object, however, is a

true sacrifice. To be a true sacrifice, the object offered, or victim, must, in some way, be *destroyed;* and in this destruction consists the sacrificial act. Therefore live victims were destroyed by being slain; incense was consumed by fire; wine was poured out. This destruction, or like change of the object, is essential to the sacrifice, because thus the supreme dominion of God over all things, over life and death, existence and non-existence, and the utter dependence of man and of all creatures upon Him are sensibly represented. Hence it follows that sacrifice is the sublimest and most perfect kind of divine worship, being a visible representation and acknowledgment of God's supreme dominion and our total submission to Him.

2. Now, the holy sacrifice of the *Mass is a true sacrifice.* All Christians, even the adversaries of the Catholic Church, admit that, if there is a permanent sacrifice in the Christian religion, it must be the sacrifice of the Mass, since the sacrifice on the cross was not permanent, but was consummated once for all on the hill of Calvary. Therefore all agree that either the sacrifice of the Mass is a true sacrifice, or that in the Christian religion there is no permanent sacrifice. But the latter cannot be admitted. Hence it follows necessarily that the Mass is a true sacrifice, the permanent sacrifice of the New Law. I said that it is inadmissible that there should be no real and permanent sacrifice in the Christian dispensation. Why so?

The offering of sacrifice, being the most perfect act of divine worship, is, if not prescribed by the *natural law*, yet so consistent with it, that its absence would seem utterly irreconcilable with the idea of a true religion. Therefore we find in history that sacrifice has been an essential part in the religion of all nations, whether the religions themselves were true or false.

Is it likely, then, or even possible, that God, the author of the natural law, would establish a religion which would lack this most perfect species of divine worship, which the natural law itself demands as the only befitting homage to the Most High?

Besides, this same truth follows evidently from the *perfection of the Christian religion.* For, sacrifice, as I have said, is the most perfect species of divine worship. Now, if Christ, the founder of our holy religion, had not established a true and permanent sacrifice in His Church, the Christian religion would lack an adequate divine worship. But this cannot be. For, since the Christian religion is the most perfect and complete of all religions, it must necessarily have a perfect worship and, consequently, a true and permanent sacrifice. Without a true and permanent sacrifice the Christian religion would be even more imperfect than the religion of the Old Law, which possessed a variety of sacrifices positively instituted by God. Who can admit such an impropriety? Is it reasonable to admit that the Old Law, which was only a figure of the New, was more perfect in its divine worship than the religion of Jesus Christ? Can the shadow and figure be more perfect than the reality? The religion of Jesus Christ must, therefore, have a true and permanent sacrifice; and that sacrifice can be no other than the adorable sacrifice of the Mass, since in the Christian religion there actually exists no other.

It were an easy matter, if time only sufficed, to show from the Holy Scripture both of the Old Testament and the New, and from Tradition, that the holy Mass is a true sacrifice. Let it suffice, therefore, to say that the Council of Trent (Sess. 22, cap. i. can. 1.) has clearly defined as an article of faith, which all are bound to believe, that holy Mass is a true sacrifice.

3. But the sacrifice of the Mass is not only a true sacrifice, it is also the *most perfect sacrifice*. By this holy sacrifice an appropriate, that is, an infinite honor is paid to God. To a true sacrifice three things are essential: the victim, the sacrificing priest, and the sacrificial act. But in the holy sacrifice of the Mass the victim is the most precious, the priest the most worthy, and the sacrificial act is the most sublime.

The *victim* is the most precious. For, who is this victim? According to the teaching of the Church, it is the self-same victim that was once offered on the cross. But the victim which was offered on the cross was Jesus Christ, the Son of God—His precious life, His adorable body and blood, which was sacrificed for our Redemption. It is the same Jesus Christ, therefore, who is the paschal lamb offered for us on the altar. It is no less a victim than the God-man who died for us on the cross that is offered for us in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Can we imagine a more precious victim?

The sacrificing *priest* is the most worthy. In the holy sacrifice of the Mass Jesus Christ is not only the victim, but also the high-priest; for the Council of Trent teaches us that the "same Christ who sacrificed Himself upon the cross now offers Himself on the altar, by the ministry of the priest" (Ibid. cap. ii.). Since, therefore, Christ Himself is the sacrificing priest in holy Mass, an infinite honor is paid to God, and the sacrifice remains spotless, however unworthy may be the priest who ministers at the altar.

Finally, the *sacrificial act* is most sublime. The sacrificial act in holy Mass consists in the consecration or change of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The ceremonies prescribed by the Church, the ancient and venerable prayers which accompany

the holy sacrifice, though full of meaning and breathing the sweetest odor of devotion, are not essential to the sacrifice. The Communion of the priest, though necessary for the entirety of the sacrificial act, does not belong to the essence of the sacrifice. The consecration alone constitutes its essence. By this act alone Jesus Christ becomes a true victim. For, if the nature of the sacrifice requires the destruction, or a similar transformation of the victim, this condition is entirely fulfilled in the act of consecration. In virtue of this act Jesus Christ, the Son of God, enters into a state which is similar to death; a state in which, without a new miracle, He would be deprived of all bodily activity and the use of his bodily senses, as if He were a dead body. Is this not a true destruction, a self-annihilation on the part of the Son of God? And how many miracles is He pleased to work to put Himself in this abject state as the daily victim of the sacrifice of the New Law! Is it not most true, then, that the sacrificial act in this tremendous sacrifice is of a most wonderful character? Holy Mass is, therefore, not only a true sacrifice, but the most perfect of all sacrifices—a sacrifice which gives to God a homage worthy of His divine majesty, an infinite homage.

4. But what makes this sacrifice most pleasing to Almighty God, and what, at the same time, should fill us with the highest esteem and profoundest reverence for it, is its intimate *relation to the sacrifice of the cross.* The holy Mass is a true and living representation of the sacrifice of Calvary. "Jesus Christ," as the Council of Trent expressly teaches, "has bequeathed His Church a sacrifice, by means of which the same bleeding sacrifice, once offered on the cross, might be represented, and its memory perpetuated to the end of the world" (Ibid. cap. i.). This sacrifice of which the

Council speaks is the holy sacrifice of the Mass. As once on the cross, so here Jesus Christ offers Himself really and truly, though in an unbloody manner. The separation of the species, or appearances of bread and wine, under which the sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ are really contained, is a suitable representation of Christ's death upon the cross by the shedding of His blood, in which consisted the sacrifice of Calvary. The fruits of both sacrifices, namely, the merits of Jesus Christ, are also the same in both sacrifices; for Christ offers Himself on the altar with all His infinite merits, the only difference being, that on the cross Jesus Christ obtained for us His infinite merits; here He applies them to us, according to our disposition and devotion.

What I have thus far said shows to evidence that by the holy sacrifice of the Mass the greatest homage is paid to God. This being the case, what must we think of the conduct of so many Christians, who show such surprising indifference in regard to this most holy sacrifice? What must we say of those who assist at it without the least recollection; whose minds, during this most august act of divine service, are occupied with a thousand wilful distracting thoughts? What of those who on the most trifling excuses absent themselves altogether from this divine sacrifice? Must we not say, at the very least, that they have little regard for the honor of God? But, furthermore, such lukewarm Christians show very plainly that they have little concern for the salvation of their immortal souls; for the holy sacrifice of the Mass not only enables us to pay God a befitting tribute of honor, but disposes Almighty God to open for us the inexhaustible treasures of His graces and blessings; because, as I have said, the holy sacrifice of the Mass is not only the

grandest act of divine worship, but also an inexhaustible source of supernatural graces and favors.

II. AN INEXHAUSTIBLE FOUNTAIN OF GRACE.

1. The holy sacrifice of the Mass, as we have seen, is substantially identical with the sacrifice of the Cross. Therefore, like the sacrifice of the Cross, it has of itself an infinite efficacy. *In regard to God*, therefore, the efficacy of the holy sacrifice of the Mass is actually infinite, as by it an infinite homage is paid to Him.

Not so, however, *in our regard*. In our regard its efficacy is finite, as we may easily perceive from the custom of the Church to offer several, or many Masses for the same intention. If the efficacy of the holy sacrifice in our regard were infinite, there would be no reason for offering more Masses than one for any given intention. Though infinite in themselves, God has so decreed that the fruits of holy Mass should be applied to us according to the disposition of those for whom it is offered, those who have it offered, and those who minister or assist at the offering. Hence it follows that the fruits of holy Mass, though infinite in regard to God, great and infallible also in regard to the Church at large, are in our regard commensurate with the part which we take in the offering of holy Mass, and the attention and devotion with which we assist at it. Now, which are the fruits that we reap from the holy sacrifice of the Mass? The holy Mass, besides being a sacrifice of infinite praise and thanksgiving in regard to God, is in our regard a sacrifice of *propitiation*, a sacrifice of *petition*, and a *memorial* sacrifice, and under these three respects its effects in our regard are different.

2. As a sacrifice of *propitiation* it obtains for us forgiveness of our *sins* and reconciliation with God. Yet

it does not produce this reconciliation directly as does the Sacrament of Penance; but only indirectly, by obtaining for us those graces by which the forgiveness of sins is brought about, that is, contrition and true penance.

In the second place, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, as a sacrifice of propitiation, obtains for us the remission of the *temporal punishment* due to sin, after the sin itself has been remitted. And this effect it obtains directly; for, according to the teaching of the Church, holy Mass is profitable for the dead as well as for the living. But for the dead, who can no longer perform works of true merit or satisfaction, it can only have a direct or immediate effect. But there is no reason why it should not in like manner directly cancel the debt of temporal punishment for the living.

It is likewise owing to the constant offering of the adorable sacrifice of the Mass, that so many *chastisements of God are averted* from whole countries and nations, and from the world at large. If, in times gone by, the rainbow was a sign which reminded God of His covenant with men, and staid His avenging hand from His sinful people, how much more efficacious, to appease His wrath, will be the sight of His own beloved Son, who daily in thousands of places offers Himself on the altar as an atonement for the sins of men! "It is my belief," says St. Leonard of Porto Maurizio, "that, if the holy sacrifice of the Mass did not exist, the world should long since have perished, as it could not bear the pressure of so many sins." Should, then, this thrice-holy sacrifice cease to exist, we should have nothing to await but the dreadful expectation of the judgment, and the rage of fire, which shall consume the adversaries of God (Heb. x. 27).

3. As a sacrifice of *petition* the holy Mass, ac-

cording to the teaching of the Church, is the most powerful means of obtaining all those graces which are necessary for the attainment of our eternal salvation. In this holy sacrifice we pray not alone; but Christ prays with us. Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, can the heavenly Father refuse to grant His petitions to His only-begotten Son? But not only spiritual and supernatural graces, but also temporal favors and blessings flow to us in abundance from this inexhaustible treasury of God's beneficence.

4. Finally, as a *memorial* sacrifice, it is a perpetual remembrance of the bitter passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. And thus it is a constant reminder for us in our spiritual life. By the continued celebration of holy Mass, which puts before us in such an impressive manner the death of Christ upon the cross, the memory of the work of our Redemption is constantly kept fresh and active in our minds. Every altar is a Calvary, on which the standard of the cross is planted. At the sight of this sign of salvation the souls of the faithful are moved, enter into themselves, and exclaim in admiration and love: My love is crucified! Who can behold this mystery without being aroused to fervor in spiritual life! Can there be a more powerful means, then, daily to renew us in Christian life, than the most holy sacrifice of the Mass?

The holy sacrifice of the Mass is, therefore, on the one hand, the most perfect homage and worship we can pay to God, and, on the other hand, an inexhaustible source of graces and blessings. In it we possess a treasure of inestimable value. Should not this consideration inspire us with an ardent love for that most loving divine Heart, from which this treasure flows? Does not the institution of the unbloody sacrifice of the New Law testify the most wonderful and unspeak-

able love of the most Sacred Heart of our Divine Lord? Before the divine Heart was plunged into the sea of bitterness and agony, before It finally broke in death, It once more, like the glorious setting sun bursting through the golden clouds of the west, poured forth all the radiance of Its love, in the institution of this divine sacrifice. In the sight of cruel death, in the night in which He was betrayed, our dear Lord bequeathed to us this highest and most wonderful pledge of His love in the most unspeakable mystery of the altar. Such was His love that He could not abandon us altogether; and thus He contrived to remain with us to the end of time, and to renew for us, from day to day, on thousands of altars, the sacrifice of Calvary. Greater love He could not have shown us. Let us, then, love and praise the Sacred Heart of our Divine Lord in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar and the adorable sacrifice of the Mass! Let us throw off our former lukewarmness and neglect in regard to this tremendous mystery, and henceforth make it the centre of our love and devotion. Amen.

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost.

LUKEWARMNESS.

"Behold, they have now been with Me three days, and have nothing to eat."—Mark viii. 2.

THE fervor which those good people, who followed Our Lord day and night, displayed, is well calculated to put to shame many Christians of our day. For, while they were so concerned for their salvation that they followed our blessed Lord into the desert, and, forgetful even of the necessary food, spent entire days listening to His divine teaching, many Christians of our own day are utterly unconcerned for their salvation. They think they have much more important business to mind, namely, to make money, and become rich and great. But for their souls they are willing to do only what is barely necessary to escape eternal punishment. They think it is much if they keep their souls free from mortal sin. Of venial sins, which deserve only temporal punishment, they make no account. It is not the love of God, but only servile fear, that actuates them in their doings. This is the sad and ignoble state or disposition of the Christian which is called *lukewarmness*, or tepidity. It is against this lamentable and dangerous condition of the soul that I would put you on your guard to-day.

For this end I shall direct your attention to the dangers which it entails. These dangers, I say, are very serious, because lukewarmness is a malady of the soul which is, in the first place, very *grievous*, and, in the second place, very *difficult to be cured*.

I. A GRIEVOUS MALADY.

1. That tepidity is a real spiritual *malady* of the soul, may be easily perceived. By bodily disease we understand a condition in which the body is impeded in the discharge of the necessary functions of life. Thus, in like manner, lukewarmness impedes the soul of man in the discharge of those spiritual functions which are necessary for the existence and well-being of the supernatural life. It is, therefore, a true spiritual malady.

2. It is, moreover, a *grievous* malady; it is most dangerous and easily leads to spiritual death. Why? Because the tepid soul is in the greatest danger of falling into grievous sin. For the danger of falling into grievous sin, as every one will easily perceive, is the greater, the more numerous and violent are the temptations, on the one hand, and the weaker the person tempted is, on the other. But both these conditions are realized, to the fullest extent, in the case of the lukewarm Christian.

a. The lukewarm soul is exposed to *many and grievous temptations.* The reason is, because, far from eschewing temptations, the tepid, on the contrary, seek them. For, what is the highest aim of such lukewarm Christians? Is it not riches, and honors, and distinctions, and sensual pleasures? But are not these connected with the most grievous temptations? For, if one sets his heart on money, he is occupied day and night with the thought of enriching himself. But the Apostle St. Paul tells us expressly that "they that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition" (I. Tim. vi. 9). And if a man covets honors and distinctions, he is under the tyranny of pride, and is exposed to all those numberless temptations which this most

dangerous of all vices brings in its train. But if a person has once given himself up to sensual pleasures, his appetites become utterly ungovernable and drag him with violence into every occasion of gratifying them. Is it not evident, then, that the lukewarm soul exposes itself to countless and grievous temptations?

b. The lukewarm soul is, on the other hand, extremely *weak*. It is weak, because grace, in which the supernatural strength of the soul consists, can be but sparingly bestowed on it. The tepid Christian behaves towards God in a manner which is ill calculated to secure His liberality towards him. His conduct is equivalent to formal *contempt of God*. Or, is not the negligence with which he serves God truly contemptuous? Does he not by his very behavior declare Almighty God to be in his estimation of so little worth as to be unworthy of his serious consideration or service; of so little significance, as to deserve neither love nor fear; of so little authority, that His will and commandments may be neglected with impunity? Is such conduct not true contempt? Is such conduct likely to move God liberally to bestow His graces upon him?

Moreover, the lukewarm Christian *neglects the means of grace*. As far as prayer is concerned, he does not mind beginning and passing the day without praying; and if he happens to say a prayer at night, before going to rest, it is commonly only with the lips; but his heart is far from God. He hears Mass on Sundays and days of obligation, unless he finds some excuse which he thinks will justify him in absenting himself; for, if he did not make it a point to fulfil this obligation in some way, he would belong, not to the class of the lukewarm, but to that of grievous sinners; but you will rarely, if ever, find him at high Mass, sermon, or any of the other services of the Church. But how does

he hear Mass? Are his thoughts directed to God, or to the sacred function? No; he brings all his worldly concerns with him to the house of God; they engross his whole attention. To keep up appearances he receives the sacraments once or twice a year; but with what devotion and with what fruit, he is not concerned, provided he do what is essential to avoid committing a manifest sacrilege. Need we wonder, then, that Almighty God sparingly dispenses His graces to such a lukewarm soul? Need we wonder that the tepid soul is weak and unable to withstand the shock of temptation?

If, then, the lukewarm Christian is exposed to so numerous and grievous temptations, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, devoid of all spiritual energy, is it not manifest that he is in the greatest danger of sooner or later yielding to temptation and falling into grievous sin? Would it not be a true miracle, if, in such circumstances, he should not fall? Tepidity is, therefore, a dangerous disease, which very easily and most commonly leads to spiritual death. But, what should most earnestly incite us to guard against this malady, or, in case we have already fallen into it, to employ all means to rid ourselves of it, is the fact that, if we allow it once to take root in our souls, it cannot without great difficulty be removed.

II. A MALADY DIFFICULT TO BE CURED.

Tepidity is a disease of the soul that is much more difficult to heal than many others that are in themselves of a graver character. A malady is difficult to cure in the following three cases: first, when the patient does not acknowledge the existence of the disease; for, that is a sure sign that the disease has taken very deep root in his constitution, or that it has

weakened him to the degree of insensibility; secondly, when the patient puts no trust in the physician; for, if he fails to confide in him, he will not follow his prescriptions; thirdly, when no favorable symptoms manifest themselves in the course of the illness, this being an indication of absolute exhaustion of the patient's vitality. In each of these cases taken singly the disease is extremely hard to remedy; but if all combine, the case becomes all but hopeless. But, in this spiritual malady, especially if it has become chronic, we find all those unfavorable symptoms actually combined.

1. The lukewarm Christian is *not sensible of his malady*, because his conscience is benumbed. He has a callous conscience. His constant neglect in the service of God, the numberless wilful venial sins, which he continues to commit daily, have blunted the edge of his conscience and rendered it all but insensible. His conscience does not reproach him, as long as he perceives no grievous guilt. He has not committed murder, or grave theft or dishonesty; neither has he committed adultery, nor is he given to drunkenness; he entertains no serious enmities; in short, there is nothing that weighs heavily on his conscience. But his pride and envy, his petty dishonesties, his rather free manner in conversation and society, his intemperance, which never reaches the point of intoxication—all these, and a thousand other venial sins have no terror for his conscience. He has been used to bear all this without misgiving. His conscience is mute, because he carefully avoids everything that awakens it to the danger of his state. If he happens to be present at a sermon, he either abandons himself to all manner of distractions, or listens only in the capacity of a critic, whom the matter itself does not concern. He never takes a pious book into his hand the whole year round. He never

associates with pious and fervent Christians; such society is too dull for him. Even the Sacrament of Penance has no influence over him; for whatever we may think of the worthiness of his confessions, it is certain that his disposition is not such as to secure large and lasting fruit.

2. Now, if the confessor, who is his spiritual physician, warns the tepid Christian of the sickly condition of his soul, and remonstrates seriously with him, he *will not believe* him. The confessor, he thinks, is too strict and scrupulous, his threats are exaggerated, and his demands are such as might be made upon those who live in the cloister, or in the desert, but are altogether unsuited for people living in the world and moving in society.

3. Finally, in this disease we meet with no *favorable symptoms*, such as are wont to give grounds for some hope, even in favor of the greatest sinners. They have no regret for temporal losses, such as may arouse the spendthrift or the drunkard to a sense of his wretched state; no sense of shame, such as may bring back the thief or defrauder to an honest life; no loathing, or satiety, such as may moderate the lusts of the licentious; no punishment, no obstructions, no reproach; in fact, there is no favorable crisis, which may bring the lukewarm Christian to better sentiments.

All imaginable circumstances, therefore, combine to make this spiritual malady the most dangerous, both in itself, and in its effects, and in its surroundings. For the cure of this disease is, consequently, required an extraordinary grace, to overcome so many and so great obstacles. But does the lukewarm Christian behave in such a way as to entitle him on any grounds to hope for such a grace? His conduct, as we have seen, on the contrary, is such as to entitle him to be treated very

sparingly by Almighty God. Is it, then, an exaggeration to say that this malady is very difficult to be remedied? Nay, it were utterly incurable, if God were not infinitely merciful. Yet He is so bountiful and full of pity, that He will not abandon us, though we raise such obstruction against Him. He does not withhold His mercy even from the greatest and most thankless sinners. May it not have been this goodness and mercy of God, that inspired me to-day to address you on this subject? Is not what I have said well calculated to open the eyes of those who are diseased with this dreadful malady, and to induce them at length to shake off the burden of their tepidity? Oh, then, I beseech you, beloved brethren, make use of this grace! Let my words be a warning for those who have thus far lived a fervent life, and strengthen them in their fervor. And should there be amongst you such as suffer under this deadly disease, I pray and exhort them to listen to the good inspiration of God, to shake off their lethargy, and return at once to the practices of a fervent Christian life. Thus their sick souls shall be healed, and they shall secure their eternal salvation. Amen.

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost.

FAITH AND GOOD WORKS.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire."—Matt. vii. 19.

WITH these words Our Lord would impress upon us the necessity of *good works;* for by good fruit are here understood good works, that is, works performed for the honor and glory of God. As the tree that bears no good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire, so the man who does not good works is severed from the root and source of sanctity, which is Christ Jesus, and consigned to the flames of hell. This doctrine of the Gospel offers me a fit occasion to exhort you to the fervent practice of good works; and for this end there is no lack of the most powerful motives. But for to-day I shall confine myself to a single one—one that must needs have the greatest weight with you, as you esteem the unerring faith which you profess. This motive is the utter *dependence of our faith* upon the exercise of good works. Such is this dependence, that he who neglects the practice of good works may easily suffer shipwreck in the faith, while, on the other hand, he who once begins fervently to practise good works, though he may have for a time lost the faith, may easily recover it. I shall, accordingly, endeavor to show you in this discourse—

1. *That the neglect of good works may easily entail the loss of faith.*

2. *That the fervent practice of good works may easily regain faith once lost.*

I. FAITH LOST BY NEGLECT OF GOOD WORKS.

The loss of faith, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, may come either from ourselves, or from God. It comes from ourselves, when we do not endeavor carefully to preserve the treasure of the faith; it comes from God, when in His justice He withdraws from us the grace of faith. But in both cases, the chief and original cause of the loss of faith is the neglect of good works.

1. Let us first consider the case in which the loss of faith *originates with ourselves;* and let us try to make it clear to ourselves how this comes to pass. As I have said, the loss of faith, when it proceeds from ourselves, is brought about by the fact that we neglect to preserve it, that is, to keep it alive within us; for, as we read in the Epistle of St. James, our faith should be a *living* faith. But what is it that makes and keeps it a living faith? It is, according to the same Apostle, the good works which we perform, for he says expressly: "As the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James ii. 26). Hence it evidently follows that by the neglect of good works our faith gradually *languishes.*

But the neglect of good works may easily lead to the *utter extinction* of faith. True faith once received cannot be utterly extinguished except by a sin of infidelity, since, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent, only the sin of infidelity effects that the virtue of faith is lost. But if a man ceases to practise works of piety, he runs the risk gradually and almost insensibly to fall into the sin of infidelity, and thus to lose the virtue of faith. For, whoever once ceases to practise the works of faith, the duties of his religion—daily prayer, the services of the Church, the hearing of the word of God, the frequenting of the sacraments, and other

works of Christian piety—he will sooner or later lose all relish and love for the faith, and finally throw faith itself overboard. For, how can a man retain any esteem for that which he does not practise, and for which he is not in the least concerned? How can a man have a relish for a faith which condemns his works and desires, all the immoderate passions by which he is ruled—a faith which is to him a heavy and irksome burden? But with the relish and love for the faith, the necessary submission of the will and understanding, which faith requires, is soon lost. For we find it difficult, says St. Bernard, fully and sincerely to submit to what is contrary to our inclination, and not to contradict what is disagreeable to us. But, since the obedience or submission of the understanding is necessary for faith, there soon remains of this virtue only the outward appearance or the empty name; a state which, in the eyes of God, is just as condemnable as paganism or infidelity. You see, then, beloved brethren, that the loss of faith, when it originates with ourselves, has for its cause the neglect of good works.

2. The ultimate cause is the same when the loss of faith *comes from God*, that is, when God withholds or withdraws the grace of faith as a punishment for our sins. God inflicts this terrible punishment only on those who neglect to make use of the grace of faith, who do not foster the good seed, that it may grow and produce fruit, but allow it to remain fruitless and inactive; in other words, who neglect to produce good works, which are the fruits of faith. That the neglect of good works is the ultimate cause, also in this case, is the manifest teaching of Holy Scripture. For in the Book of Revelations we read the following words, which St. John, by express command of God, writes to the bishop

of Ephesus, who had begun to neglect the practice of good works: "Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen; and do penance, and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance" (Apoc. ii. 5). By the candlestick is understood, according to the interpretation of St. Gregory, the virtue of faith. The very same truth Christ teaches by the parable of the hidden talent, which his lord took from his worthless servant for no other reason than because he did not make it fruitful (Matt. xxv. 28). For, according to St. Augustine, that talent signifies the virtue of faith, which we should make fruitful by good works. And does not reason itself teach us the same thing? For, as St. Chrysostom remarks, faith is given us only that it may be operative; but its only activity is directed towards enabling us to perform good works. Hence it is manifest that God, for the sake of His own honor, must take away the lamp of faith from those who no longer use it to light them to good works.

This is the reason why so many highly gifted and educated men, who have achieved much on the fields of art and science, have fallen into such blindness that they will no longer hear of God, or faith, or religion. If, then, beloved brethren, we would avoid this blindness, if the light of faith should always illumine our paths, we must live up to our faith; we must do those works which it prescribes, and be fervent in the practice of our holy religion; but if, through past neglect of the practices of Christian virtue, you have, perchance, already impaired or weakened, or utterly extinguished the light of faith, there is again no more efficacious means of regaining it in its native splendor than the fervent practice of good works.

II. LOST FAITH REGAINED BY GOOD WORKS.

By the practice of good works faith is regained or perfected. The reason is, that God, who by His grace strengthens and enlivens our faith, has made this grace dependent on the performance of good works.

1. We have a striking illustration of this law of grace in the conversion of *Cornelius, the centurion*, which is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. He was a pagan; yet he had some faith, though obscure and undeveloped; for he is called by the Scriptures a God-fearing man. Therefore he had some religion and fear of God, and communicated the same to his household; for it is said: "He feared God with his whole house." But how did he pass from this obscure and undeveloped faith to a clear and explicit faith? He came to this result by the practice of good works, particularly by alms-deeds and prayer. He gave much alms to the people, we are told, and prayed to God always. Therefore the angel of God one day entered his house and said to him: "Thy prayers and thy alms are ascended for a memorial in the sight of God. And now send men to Joppe, and call hither one Simon who is surnamed Peter, and he will tell thee what thou must do." He followed the direction of the angel, and thus received the grace of faith with his whole house (Acts x). It is, therefore, by good works especially that faith is perfected. For if Cornelius had not performed those good works, if he had not prayed and given alms, God would not have sent him His angel, and he would have languished in the darkness of paganism.

However weak, then, your faith may be, my dear friend, you have still as much left you as this poor pagan centurion had. Imitate his example, therefore; pray without ceasing, as he did; give alms, according

to your means, like him; and, if you are the head of a family, keep your children to the exercises of piety in like manner; and God, who is faithful to His promises, will, in a similar way, send His Holy Spirit upon you, and enlighten you, and strengthen and increase your faith.

2. And, in fact, certain *remarkable conversions,* which from time to time excite our admiration, can hardly be said to have any other cause than the good works which such erring souls have, despite their errors, continued to perform. For, with all their worldliness and scanty faith, they persisted in doing some good. They said, perhaps, their daily prayers with considerable regularity; they were charitable to the poor; they prayed to God that He might show them the true way of salvation; their prayers and alms-deeds, like those of Cornelius, ascended as a memorial before God. Hence good works, in the language of the holy Fathers, are called edifying works; that is, works by which faith is built up, or repaired. Therefore St. Paul earnestly exhorts his beloved disciple St. Timothy to arouse within himself by the practice of good works the grace which he had received. "For which cause I admonish thee," he says, "that thou stir up the grace of God, which is in thee by the imposition of my hands" (II. Tim. i. 6).

From what I have said may be clearly seen that it is our good works which move Almighty God to shed upon us the light of His grace, and restore to us, or perfect in us the divine gift of faith. God has, therefore, manifestly made the existence and increase of faith within us dependent on the practice of good works. Should not this motive incite us to be diligent in the performance of good works? Is not faith, which is here at stake, the greatest and most valuable gift

which the mercy of God has bestowed on us? What should we be without faith? What manner of life would we lead? What would be our lot for eternity? Should we not, then, make the greatest effort to preserve this precious treasure? And since the means of preserving it is the practice of good works, should we not use our utmost exertions to this end?

Is it, then, too much to require of you, beloved brethren, in order to secure the priceless boon of faith, to say your daily prayers with devotion and attention, to assist regularly and reverently at the services of the Church on Sundays and feasts of obligation, frequently and worthily to approach the holy sacraments, to give liberally of your abundance to the poor, and, according to your means and ability, to take part in all good works? Is it too much if I ask the young men and young women to be faithful in the fulfilment of the duties of their state? Is it too much to require of the heads of families to govern their household in a Christian spirit, to maintain Christian discipline and order in their families? Is it too much if I ask of you all together to sanctify your ordinary actions by a good intention, and thus to transform them into so many good works, that will bring forth fruit for everlasting life? Let me ask you, then, beloved brethren, so to dispose your actions and your whole lives that your faith may ever grow stronger and more lively, and light you on the path that leads to the blissful vision of God in His never ending glory. Amen.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost.

ALMS-GIVING.

"I say to you : make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity." —Luke xvi. 9.

By these words our blessed Lord admonishes us that we should use the goods of this world, which are so apt to mislead us to our ruin, as far as possible, for good purposes. He calls riches here the mammon of iniquity, not because He supposes them to be acquired by unjust means, but because they so easily lead us to dishonesty, avarice, intemperance, dissipation; in short, to every species of iniquity. But if we make use of the goods of this world to do good, to give alms, we make friends to ourselves, who shall once receive us into the everlasting mansions. These friends are God and His holy Mother, and the angels and saints; these friends are the merits which we send before us, to open for us the gates of heaven and to be our crown for all eternity. I shall, therefore, to-day take alms-deeds for the subject of my discourse, and endeavor to impress upon you the motives for the fervent practice of this Christian work -not as if I considered you neglectful in this matter, which, thanks be to God, is by no means the case, but that you may in future practise this salutary work in the spirit of faith, and reap the greater spiritual benefit from your alms-giving. Now, there are two motives which deserve special attention and which I purpose to submit to your consideration—

1. *The duty of alms-giving;*
2. *The advantages of alms-giving.*

I. DUTY OF ALMS-GIVING.

1. The duty of giving alms is manifest from the fact that it is a strict *commandment* of God. For, according to the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ at the Last Judgment will condemn to eternal punishment those who have neglected to give alms to Him in the persons of His poor here upon earth. His sentence to them will be: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me not to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me not in; naked, and you covered Me not; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me" (Matt. xxv. 41-43). That Christ did not here mean Himself personally, but the poor, who are His representatives, He clearly shows by the words that follow: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you do it to Me" (Ibid. 45). Since, therefore, as you see, the neglect of alms-deeds is punished with everlasting fire, it evidently follows that alms-giving is a strict commandment; for, as St. Chrysostom remarks, Almighty God does not condemn one to everlasting punishment for neglecting a counsel of the Gospel, but only for the transgression of a strict precept.

2. Alms-giving is, therefore, a strict duty; but it is, at the same time, a most sacred duty; for it is—

a. A duty of *justice towards God.* God is the Creator and therefore the absolute Lord and Master of all visible goods. You are, therefore, beloved brethren, only His stewards in the administration of your property, and as such you are bound to pay tribute and interest to Almighty God, if such is His divine will. For, since whatever you have is His property, all its fruits by right belong to Him. Now, Almighty God actual-

ly requires a tribute of us; and this tribute is the alms which He prescribes and sanctions under the penalty of the loss of our eternal salvation. But this tribute He does not ask to be paid to Himself, but to the poor, whom He has made His heirs and representatives, and who can justly claim our assistance in His name. Hence St. Peter Chrysologus calls the poor the rent-agents of God on earth. Alms-giving is, therefore, a sacred duty of justice to God.

From this fact follow three truths which are of great practical import for us. The first is, that if a rich man, that is, one who possesses more than is necessary to live in accordance with his station in life, would refuse to give any alms at all, or would generally refuse, he could hardly be excused from a *grievous sin*. For such a one refuses to pay to God the tribute that is due to Him, and is, therefore, guilty of a revolt against his supreme Lord, which is assuredly no trifling offence.

The second truth that follows from the duty of alms-giving as an act of justice towards God is that your alms-deeds should *never be an object of vanity* or pride. For, what is it you do when you give an alms? You pay God the tribute that is due to Him, as your Lord, and thus acknowledge your dependence upon Him, whose vassal you are. Is that a matter of pride? Is it not rather an occasion of humbling yourself?

The third practical conclusion is that our alms, in order to be pleasing to God, should be *in proportion to our means;* for it is evident that God requires of us a tribute which is in accordance with our means. Therefore St. Ambrose, who is otherwise so moderate in his views and expressions, says: "It is an abuse and not an alms, if a man who possesses much gives but little." But how unreasonable do we often find people

in this respect! While they are anxious to have everything else in keeping with their station—food, clothing, lodging, furniture—they make a glaring exception in regard to alms-giving. They forget that alms-deeds are not a matter of choice, but a real debt which they owe to God. They forget that they commit an outrage against their sovereign Lord, when they neglect to discharge the duty of alms-giving, especially since God gave this commandment, not only in view of His own supreme dominion, but also in favor of the poor, and since He has thus made the rich the representatives and dispensers of His Divine Providence in behalf of the poor. If, then, they refuse to take upon themselves this office of God's dispensers, or fail to fulfil this duty, they frustrate the designs of Divine Wisdom, shorten, as it were, God's almighty and merciful arm, and stay the hand of His loving Providence. And a larger share of guilt will fall upon the heads of such heartless and selfish men, if on their account the poor, dissatisfied with their lot, as often happens, murmur against Divine Providence, and perhaps go so far as to blaspheme or disbelieve it.

b. But alms-giving is also a duty of *love and mercy* towards the poor. For, who are the poor in question? Are they not, in the words of the Holy Ghost (Is. lviii. 7), our own flesh, that is, men and women of the same nature as ourselves? Are they not, as we, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ? (Rom. viii. 17.) Are we not, then, in conscience bound to love them and, consequently, to relieve their want, according to our ability? So the Apostle St. John teaches us, when he writes: "He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him, how doth the charity of God abide in him?" (I. John iii. 17.)

Alms-giving is, therefore, for all those who possess abundance a most sacred duty—a duty of justice towards God and His poor, and a duty of love and mercy towards their own brethren. But what should make the fulfilment of this duty, not a burden, but a pleasure for us; what should greatly encourage us to do even more in this regard than duty requires; what should urge us to contribute joyfully and liberally, according to our means, to all good purposes, are the great advantages to be reaped from alms-giving.

II. ADVANTAGES OF ALMS-GIVING.

The fruits of alms-giving, beloved brethren, are most remarkable; nor are they only spiritual, but also temporal fruits.

1. To the *temporal* advantages arising from alms-deeds the Wise Man in the Proverbs draws our attention, when he says: "He that giveth to the poor, shall not want; he that despiseth his entreaty, shall suffer indigence" (Prov. xxviii. 27). These and similar promises, it is true, refer, in the first instance, to the Old Law, which usually holds out temporal rewards to those who observe it. But we have reason to admit that also in the New Law alms-giving brings upon us special temporal blessings, when such are for our spiritual good. For God is wont, in order to give us a palpable proof of His justice, to repay our works, whether good or evil, also with temporal rewards in this life. And this temporal retribution is commonly in accordance with the nature of our works, so that God may be said to repay us in kind. The natural reward of alms-giving is, accordingly, a greater fulness of temporal blessings, especially a liberal share in the goods of this world.

Besides, it is manifest that the fatherly *providence of*

God towards the poor will dispose Him to bestow His temporal favors liberally upon those who, He foresees, will use them according to His intention for the relief of the poor, in preference to those who have only their own interest in view.

Moreover, according to the teaching of the Gospel, the reward for the good use of the talents received consists in their *increase*. If, then, the talents bestowed by God are temporal goods, and we use them to good advantage, that is, for alms and charitable works, may we not justly hope that He will add to the talents already given others of the same kind, that we may use them in like manner for His honor and glory?

Finally, *experience* itself teaches us the same truth. Time does not permit me, however, to enter upon particular facts. I shall only remind you that it is the general belief of mankind, which amounts to a truism, that by alms-deeds no one has ever become poor. Now, whence, I ask, comes this universal persuasion of mankind? From no other source than from the general experience. If, then, you would draw down the blessing of God upon your business and your temporal goods, give largely to the poor and take an active part in charitable works.

2. But an infallible reward of alms-giving consists in the *spiritual blessings* which God gives in return. "When thou shalt pour out thy soul to the hungry," says the prophet, "and shalt satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise up in darkness, and thy darkness shall be as the noon-day; and the Lord will fill thy soul with brightness; and thou shalt be like a watered garden and a fountain of water, whose waters shall not fail" (Is. lviii. 10, 11). Streams of divine light and fountains of living water, that is, floods of divine grace, shall, therefore, inundate the soul of him who gives liberally

to the poor. His soul shall be beautified and refreshed by the abundance of God's grace.

a. The first grace which our alms-deeds obtain for us is the *forgiveness of our sins*, according to the words of Holy Scripture: "Alms delivereth from death; and the same is that which purgeth away sins, and maketh to find mercy and life everlasting" (Tob. xii. 6). This is, however, not so to be understood, as if alms-deeds effected the forgiveness of sins directly and independently of the Sacrament of Penance. The meaning is that by alms-giving we obtain those graces which dispose the heart to true contrition and purpose of amendment, the disposition which is required for the worthy reception of the holy Sacrament of Penance. This fruit, 'tis true, is common to all good works; but it is most peculiar to alms-giving; for alms-deeds are diametrically opposed to avarice and pride, which are the root of all evil. It is, therefore, a good work, which has this peculiar property, that it extracts from the heart the very root of sin, viz., avarice and its offspring, vanity, pride, and luxury. Therefore our blessed Lord directed the attention of the Pharisees, who were given to avarice, to the duty of alms-giving, saying: "That which remaineth, give alms, and behold all things are clean unto you" (Luke xi. 41). It is, therefore, beyond all doubt that God will give him who liberally extends his hand to the poor the grace of a good confession and thorough conversion to God.

b. The second grace which alms-deeds obtain for us is the *remission of the temporal punishment* due to sin. If we have once obtained the forgiveness of our sins, our alms, given in the true spirit of faith, cancels the debt of punishment that still remains to be atoned for. It has this effect because it is eminently a work of penance and as such has this fruit in common with prayer

and fasting. But we may say without hesitation that alms-giving has this effect in a higher degree than the other works of penance. And the reason is, because alms is a work of penance which is in an especial way acceptable to Almighty God. For, on the one hand, as we have seen, this work of penance puts the axe to the root of sin; and, on the other hand, it demands a considerable sacrifice on the part of man to divest himself of any part of his temporal goods. It is, therefore, not at all to be wondered at that God is more disposed to accept this penitential work in satisfaction for our sins than any other of the works of penance.

c. The chief fruit of alms-deeds, however, is *everlasting life*. At the Last Judgment Christ, our Lord, will address Himself to the just with the following words: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in; naked, and you covered Me; sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me" (Matt. xxv. 34-36). And in fact, what can be more meet, beloved brethren, than that the heavenly Father should entertain at His eternal banquet those that fed His little ones here on earth; that He should refresh with the fountain of eternal delight those that here below applied the cup of refreshment to the parched lips of His languishing children; that He should clothe with eternal glory those that covered the naked limbs of the indigent; that He should receive into His eternal mansions those who afforded a roof to the homeless?

From all this you see, beloved brethren, how liberally God rewards our alms, and how true are the words of the Wise Man: "He that hath mercy on the

poor, lendeth to the Lord; and He will repay him" (Prov. xix. 17). For, apart from the temporal advantages that accrue to us from our alms-deeds, can we imagine a greater and grander recompense than the forgiveness of our sins, the remission of the temporal punishment due to them, and eternal glory itself? Should not such liberal rewards animate us fervently to practise so fruitful a work? And if we consider, moreover, as I have shown you in the first part, that alms-giving is a most strict and sacred duty for the rich—a duty which binds them under pain of grievous sin—must we not say that it is the most reckless folly to neglect a Christian work of such moment? Beware, then, of such a neglect, which is a madness and a crime at the same time. Give generously of your abundance to the poor. But above all, be generous when your aid is solicited for the suffering head of the Catholic Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, whom the iniquity of men has left at the mercy of the faithful. Be liberal in the support of your own schools and charitable institutions, and Almighty God will reward you a thousandfold, both in this life and the life to come. Amen.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE.

"And when He drew near, seeing the city, He wept over it."—Luke xix. 41.

THOUGH Christ our Lord had already lavished such extraordinary graces on the city of Jerusalem, He desired, on this occasion, as we see from the Gospel, to pay her one more loving visit, to avert, if possible, the dreadful calamity that was overhanging her. And as was His merciful behavior towards the Holy City, such it is also towards the sinner. For, although the sinner may have obstinately resisted Him for years, yet He will not abandon him to the eternal ruin towards which he steers. The means which He uses to arouse the sinner to a sense of his condition are the internal warnings and threats of punishment with which He alarms him and stimulates his conscience, in other words, *remorse of conscience.* This stimulating voice of conscience is, therefore, the voice of God calling the sinner to penance; and it, consequently, deserves our earnest consideration. It is to this warning voice of God that I would to-day direct your attention, that in future you may hear and follow the inward admonitions of your conscience.

For this end I will show you that—

1. *Remorse of conscience is a manifestation of God's mercy to the sinner;*

2. *The sinner's resistance is an evidence of great malice against God.*

I. MERCY OF GOD CALLING TO PENANCE.

Remorse of conscience is the effect of divine mercy. Though it is disagreeable to human nature and bears the character of punishment for sin, yet we must say that it is not only a grace of God, but also the first grace that is given to the sinner, most wonderful in its nature, most consistent with the greatness and majesty of God, and most efficacious in its influence over the heart of the sinner.

1. Remorse is a *grace of God.* By grace we understand a divine assistance imparted by God to man to enable him to merit heaven; or, if he is in sin, to return to God by a true conversion. Such an assistance is, in fact, remorse of conscience; for it proceeds from God, as Holy Scripture tells us in many places. It is as if God spoke to the sinner in the following manner: I shall reproach thee with thy evil deeds; I shall arouse the anguish of thy conscience. Thou didst try to conceal thy sin and thy shame even from thyself. Thou didst turn thy eyes from thy sins and endeavor to forget them, and thou didst think that I should do the same, and leave thy conscience at peace. Thus God speaks through the Psalmist: "These things thou hast done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I shall be like to thee; but I will reprove thee and set [thy sins] before thy face" (Ps. xlix. 21). God is, therefore, manifestly the author of remorse. It is He who awakes the pangs of conscience within the sinner. And why does He call forth this torture in the heart of the sinner? To bring him to better sentiments, to put him on the way of his conversion; for He says Himself in the Apocalypse: "Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise. Be zealous, therefore, and do penance" (Apoc. iii. 19). If God, then, rebukes and chastises the sinner, it is because He loves him, and is concerned for

his welfare. But remorse is manifestly a paternal rebuke and chastisement which God inflicts on the sinner. It therefore proceeds from the love of God, and has for its object the welfare of the sinner, that is, his conversion to God. Remorse of conscience, therefore, however great a torture it may be for the sinner, is in reality a truly supernatural grace of God.

2. Nay, it is the *first grace* which God is wont to give to the sinner. According to the teaching of the Church in the Council of Trent (Sess. vi., cap. xiv., can. 3), the sinner cannot be converted unless Almighty God makes the beginning by arousing him to penitential sentiments. This anticipation on the part of God is called preventing grace. Now, among the preventing graces that precede conversion, according to the teaching of the Council, the first is remorse of conscience. This we see clearly illustrated in the conversion of David. As long as he felt no remorse he had no sorrow for his sin, no thought of conversion. Not until the prophet by a very apt and touching parable had stirred up his conscience, did he cry out in the bitterness of his soul: "I have sinned against the Lord" (II. Kings xii. 13). It was remorse of conscience, therefore, that led to his conversion; it was the first link in the chain of graces that effected his return to God. And, as in the case of David, so in the case of all sinners, the first step to conversion is remorse.

3. Besides, remorse of conscience is the most *remarkable* of all graces. It is a marvel of God's mercy in its very nature and in the manner in which it is produced. For, although nothing is so opposed to grace as sin, yet it is sin that calls this singular grace into existence. Therefore St. Chrysostom, considering this grace, which is begotten of sin, exclaims: "How wonderful, O God, is Thy mercy: Thou makest use of sin to

arouse within us the grace of remorse; Thou availest Thyself of that which has made us punishable, and brought forth death for us, to make us just and restore life to us."

4. Besides, there is no grace that is more *in keeping with the greatness and majesty of God* than that of remorse. God, it is true, shows wonderful condescension in the bestowal of this grace, as He prevents the sinner and takes the first step towards his conversion; but He does so in a manner which is altogether consistent with His greatness and majesty; He does so as Lord and Ruler; for remorse of conscience is not one of those graces by which He is wont gently to invite us, to beg and beseech us, to draw us with the sweetness and unction of His inspirations. No, beloved brethren; this grace bears the characteristics of a punishment marked upon it. God arises against the sinner with such indignation, as to shake his heart with fear and inspire him with a holy awe of His divine majesty. He brings him to a sense of his treason and rebellion. He makes the sinner himself acknowledge that he has done wrong and deserved chastisement, and fills his heart with the terror of His judgments. Is not this dealing with the sinner altogether in keeping with the attributes of God's greatness and majesty?

5. Finally, by this grace God exercises *the most powerful influence* over the heart of the sinner. In fact, there is nothing that so stimulates the sinner to conversion as remorse of conscience. For, in the first place, it is a dreadful torture, a racking torment, which makes man utterly unhappy. Therefore the holy Fathers call conscience the executioner within the heart of man. O beloved brethren, how many obstinate sinners have put an end to their own lives in the hope of freeing themselves from this terrible racking of the soul! In

the second place, there is no other means of freeing one's self from this unbearable torture than conversion and amendment of life. In vain will the sinner try to banish from his mind the thought of his sin; in vain will he endeavor to stifle it by dissipating pleasures; in vain will he attempt to suppress it; as long as he persists in his impenitence, his conscience will torture him, unless it has come to the worst, and Almighty God has abandoned him to a reprobate sense.

What I have said may suffice to convince you that remorse of conscience is not only a grace of God, but one of the greatest graces which God could confer upon the sinner. Great is, therefore, the mercy of God, who bestows such a grace upon the sinner, who is His enemy. This being the case, is it not the greatest perverseness and malice on the part of the sinner to turn a deaf ear to the voice of his conscience, or try to stifle its reproaches and admonitions?

II. PERVERSENESS OF DISREGARDING THE VOICE OF CONSCIENCE.

Great is the malice of the sinner who resists the voice of conscience; his condition is the most lamentable we can imagine. This follows evidently from what I have said in the first part of this discourse.

1. He who obstinately resists the admonitions of his conscience, *resists the Holy Ghost* Himself. For, since remorse of conscience, as you have seen, is a grace, it is, like all other graces that enlighten the soul, the voice of the Holy Ghost. To resist the voice of conscience, then, is to resist the Holy Ghost Himself. Those who resist the upbraiding voice of their conscience, therefore, are obstinate sinners and deserve the reproach which St. Stephen made to the stubborn and perverse Jews: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart

and ears, you always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts vi. 51).

2. Besides, as long as the sinner persists in that disposition of resistance, he makes his conversion and consequently *his salvation impossible.* Why? Because the grace of compunction, or remorse, is the first that God gives to the sinner, in order to his conversion. But on the use of this first grace depends, as a rule, the communication of the other graces necessary for conversion, such as contrition, confession, satisfaction. Therefore, as long as the sinner persists in his resistance, and refuses to make use of this grace which God holds out to him, he cuts himself off from all further graces and puts himself in the impossibility of returning to God and working his salvation. Or, do you think that God will in his favor invert the order of His graces? It were unreasonable and presumptuous in the highest degree on his part to expect that God would make such an exception in his behalf, and to build the hope of his conversion and his eternal salvation on such an uncertain foundation.

3. Moreover, the obstinate sinner makes himself guilty of the deepest *ingratitude* towards God. For, what does God do for him by awaking in him the pangs of conscience? He works a miracle of mercy in his favor, makes his very sin the occasion of conferring upon him a signal grace, which, if used, will lead to his conversion and to his eternal salvation. And what does the obstinate sinner do, on the other hand? Far from proving himself grateful to God for such a favor, he rejects it, resists God's grace, and tries by all means, even by committing new sins, to make the grace of God ineffectual. Thus he opposes to this marvel of mercy on the part of God a marvel of malice, and makes himself guilty of the blackest ingratitude.

4. Finally, the obstinate sinner, who disregards the voice of conscience, makes himself guilty of a foul *revolt* against the authority of God. For, in bestowing this grace of compunction God does not deal with him as a friend, but as his Lord and Master. He treats him as a slave, inspiring him with a salutary fear and terror of His judgments, placing the abjectness of his condition and his total unworthiness clearly before his eyes. If, then, the sinner, despite all remonstrance on the part of God, continues his resistance, he acts like an insubordinate subject who disregards the commands and threats of his lord, reckless whether he please or displease him, whether he deserve love or hatred, reward or punishment. And who is the lord towards whom he thus behaves? It is God, his sovereign Lord, who holds his eternal destiny in His almighty hand. Does he not, then, make himself guilty of the most flagrant insubordination and foulest revolt against Almighty God?

Is it not manifest, then, from what I have said, beloved brethren, that the sinner who resists the voice of his conscience heaps upon his soul no ordinary, but an uncommonly great guilt in the eyes of God? Therefore St. Bernard justly assures us that such an obstinate sinner is on the verge of the most terrible of all calamities, and only one step removed from eternal ruin. And, in fact, is it not greatly to be feared that God will finally become tired of his resistance, withdraw His all-protecting hand from him, and abandon him to the power of the evil one and the tyranny of his own passions?

If, then, beloved brethren, you should have the misfortune of falling into sin, resist not the warnings of your conscience; hear its voice, and follow its admonitions; for it is the voice of God that speaks in your

heart. If you do so, and make use of this first grace, you will never remain long in the state of sin. God will give you further graces to repent of your sins, to confess them sincerely, and to make atonement for them with an humble and contrite heart. Thus you will regain unspeakable peace of heart, the grace to serve God with perseverance, and the crown of everlasting bliss. Amen.

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.

PERFECT CONTRITION.

"I say to you, this man went down into his house justified."—Luke xviii. 14.

THAT publican of whom the Gospel speaks was manifestly a great sinner; and yet he returned to his house justified. By what means was he justified? Evidently by perfect contrition. For, in the first place, it is apparent from his behavior that he was perfectly contrite for his sins; he stood at a distance, and did not venture to raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast and said: God be merciful to me a sinner—the most expressive indications of an humble and contrite heart. But what puts it beyond all doubt that this publican was justified through perfect contrition, is the fact that in the Old Law no other means existed for the remission of actual sin. Perfect contrition has the same efficacy with us in the Christian Dispensation. It justifies the sinner, that is, disposes him for sanctifying grace and moves God to confer it immediately, even before the sin is confessed. We should, therefore, make it a regular and constant practice often to elicit acts of perfect contrition. This is a most salutary exercise in Christian life, and to exhort you to its diligent cultivation will be the object of my present discourse.

There are chiefly two motives which, taken together, are well suited to incite us to the fervent practice of perfect contrition. They are—

1. The *facility* with which we may elicit perfect contrition.

2. The *advantages* to be derived from this exercise.

I. FACILITY.

That is justly considered easy which all, the weak as well as the strong, can do without any extraordinary effort. Now, such, I say, is the exercise of perfect contrition that every one, whether in sickness or in health, whether learned or unlearned, whether saint or sinner, can easily perform it. In order thoroughly to convince you of the facility of this practice, let us ask ourselves two questions, from the answers to which the truth of my assertion will become most evident: (1) In what does perfect contrition consist? And (2) how is an act of contrition to be elicited? From the answers to these questions we shall see that, the grace of God supposed, which never fails those who are of good will, it is altogether in the power of every man who has the use of his reason to make an act of perfect contrition.

1. Now, *what is perfect contrition?* It is the detestation of our sins and true sorrow for having offended God on account of His own infinite goodness, perfection, and amiableness, together with the firm purpose never more to offend Him, at least grievously. Perfect contrition, therefore, contains four elements: hatred of sin, true sorrow for having committed it, true love of God as the motive of our detestation and sorrow, and a sincere purpose of amendment.

a. We must, therefore, first of all *detest our sins*, i. e., we must hate and abominate, inwardly disapprove and condemn our sinful actions, and, therefore, sincerely regret having committed them. For, no one can claim forgiveness of God unless he is so disposed, sin being a

rebellion against God, an object of God's supreme hatred. Now, it is evident that we cannot, at the same time, be the friends of God, and love what God detests. If, then, we would be the friends of God, we must hate and detest sin, which is the object of God's supreme abomination. But this detestation of sin, beloved brethren, depends altogether on our own free will. For it is not necessary that we should *feel* this hatred with the same intensity as we would the horror and abomination awakened at the sight of some loathsome object or revolting action. It is sufficient that our hatred of sin is a *rational* and free disapproval and condemnation of our own actions, arising from the consciousness of having offended God. Such a reasonable detestation of sin we may call forth in our soul at any moment. Therefore, as far as the element of hatred of sin is concerned, contrition involves little difficulty.

b. The second essential element of perfect contrition is *sorrow* for the sins committed. This sorrow, or inward regret for having offended God, follows naturally from the detestation of sin; for he who truly detests his sins considers them as an evil not only of the past, but also of the present, and must necessarily regret from his inmost soul having brought such an evil upon himself. But what I have said of the hatred of sin is also true of the sorrow for sin. A true inward sorrow may exist in the soul without exercising any influence on the sensitive faculties of man. It is, therefore, not necessary to shed tears for the offences which one has committed against God; nor is it necessary to have a *sensible* sorrow for one's sins. If, then, my dear friend, you have such regret for your sins that you are ready to undergo any sacrifice which God may require to atone for them and to be reconciled with Him, you may rest assured that you have the necessary

sorrow, though you may feel no sensible compunction. But, as the detestation, so also the sorrow for sin depends altogether on the free will of man, and is, therefore, easily attainable by all.

c. The third requirement for perfect contrition is that we detest and are sorry for our sins, from the motive of the *love of God*; that is, not because we have by our sins lost the right to heaven and deserved hell or other punishments in this life or in the life to come, but because sin is an outrage against God, whom we love above all things as the Supreme Good, and who is worthy of all our love. He who is sorry for his sins only because by them he has lost the right to heaven, or deserved hell, or forfeited God's grace and friendship, has, indeed, a true supernatural and salutary sorrow for his sins, but it is only an imperfect sorrow or contrition, because it falls short of the most perfect motive, which is the love of God. But he who is sorry because by his sins he has offended and grieved God, who is not only good to us, but infinitely good in Himself, and worthy of all our love—his contrition is perfect, because it proceeds from the most perfect motive, viz., from the love of God. Since, therefore, man is gifted with free will, he may from the various motives of sorrow which present themselves choose the most perfect, that is, the love of God, and from this motive elicit sorrow for his sins. Therefore perfect contrition, also in this regard, that is, as far as its motive is concerned, is within the reach of all, even of the greatest sinners.

But, some one may say, when I think of my sins I cannot help regretting that by them I have lost the right to heaven, and deserved hell; and therefore, in any case, my sorrow is imperfect. To this I answer that your contrition is imperfect, if you confine your-

self to these imperfect motives. But what prevents you from adding the most perfect motive of the love of God at the same time? All these motives are compatible with one another. None excludes the other. Cannot a child be sorry for a fault, because by it he has deserved punishment, deprived himself of some pleasure which his parents had in store for him, and, most of all, because he has grieved a beloved father or mother? These imperfect motives we should, therefore, cherish and use to elicit sorrow for our sins; but we should never stop short at these, but always proceed to the highest motive of the love of God.

d. The fourth element of contrition is the *purpose of amendment*, that is, the firm will to avoid at least all grievous sins, and, consequently, to shun the proximate occasion of sin in future. This resolve naturally arises from the detestation and sorrow for the sins committed, and is inseparable from true contrition. For this reason it is the infallible sign of true sorrow, and, like sorrow itself, it depends altogether upon the free will of man. Having considered in what perfect contrition consists, and seen that, from its very nature, it is within the easy reach of all, let us proceed to the second question.

2. *How are we to elicit perfect contrition* for our sins? You are all doubtless familiar with the act of contrition from your catechism and prayer-book. It is, therefore, not necessary that I should dwell on the formula of contrition. What we must look to, above all things, is that our acts of contrition do not come merely from the lips, but from the heart; that we have the sentiments in our hearts which we express with our lips; and to obtain this end we must use the necessary means. These means, however, are such as entail no difficulty for any one of ordinary intelligence. They

are the following, which, in order not to detain you too long, I shall propose very briefly.

a. The first and most necessary means is *prayer;* for by prayer we obtain the necessary assistance of God's grace, without which we can do nothing that appertains to our salvation, much less a work of such moment and perfection as is an act of perfect contrition. Now, this prayer consists simply in invoking with confidence the assistance of the Holy Ghost, to enable us to make a fruitful act of perfect contrition.

b. The second is the *consideration of the infinite goodness and amiability of God.* For this purpose recall to mind the many and great favors which God has bestowed on you, especially the signal grace of the Redemption. Consider how God, to preserve you from eternal ruin and make you forever happy, sent His only-begotten Son into the world; how He took to Himself our human nature, dwelt amongst us in hardships, poverty, and contempt for three and thirty years, and finally gave His life for us on the cross. Consider how God has done all this for you, although you were His enemy. And what return have you made to Him for such love? None; and yet He continues to lavish His favors upon you; He labors to save you and make you eternally happy. Now, ask yourself, my dear friend, if God is so good and merciful to us that He has thus loved, and loaded with His favors His very enemies, how infinitely good must He be in Himself, how infinitely amiable, how worthy of all our love! Who could refuse to love Goodness, and Beauty, and Perfection Itself! Who would not exclaim with the Prince of the Apostles: I love Thee! O Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee! (John xxi.)

c. The third means to bring us to perfect contrition is the *consideration of the outrage* which sin inflicts on

God: how sin is the rebellion of the poor wretched creature against his supreme Lord, an ingratitude against a most tender and loving Father, a perfidious disloyalty against Jesus Christ, our Redeemer; how it has crucified, and crucifies again, our loving Lord and Saviour; how it is not only the greatest evil for us, but the basest and most degrading crime in the eyes of God, our most bountiful and amiable Lord and Saviour. Beloved brethren, if we seriously consider these and similar truths, it is hardly possible that we can fail to elicit true and perfect contrition.

It is, therefore, by no means difficult, but, on the contrary, with God's assistance and our own good will, it is an easy matter to elicit perfect contrition for our sins. And while it is a very easy task for the instructed Christian, it is, at the same time, a most fruitful and salutary exercise.

II. ADVANTAGES.

The advantages derived from the exercise of perfect contrition are very numerous. Prominent among them are the forgiveness of sins, the increase of sanctifying grace, remission of temporal punishment and increase of merit, peace of conscience, and the acquisition of numerous Christian virtues.

1. By perfect contrition the sinner receives *forgiveness of his sins.* In the same moment in which he elicits perfect contrition, according to the teaching of the Council of Trent (Sess. xiv., cap. 4, de pœnit.), he receives the forgiveness of his sins, is admitted into the number of God's friends, and adopted as a child of God. The reason is, because perfect contrition contains perfect love of God, which is incompatible with mortal sin. As soon as this queen of all virtues enters into the heart, by her very splendor she dispels and annihi-

lates all grievous sins. Other virtues are opposed only to certain sins, but the virtue of charity is incompatible with all mortal sins without exception. Therefore it is impossible to possess perfect charity and, at the same time, to be in the state of mortal sin. Hence it is that the Council of Trent teaches that perfect contrition reconciles the sinner with God and makes him just, even before the reception of the Sacrament of Penance.

But, some one may say within himself: if such is the case, why must we, nevertheless, receive the Sacrament of Penance, and confess the sins which are already forgiven? The reason why we must, nevertheless, confess our sins is, because the confession of at least all grievous sins has been sanctioned by Jesus Christ as a general law. Should, therefore, one who has received forgiveness of his sins by perfect contrition afterwards change his mind, and refuse to confess those sins to a priest in the tribunal of penance, and thus to procure absolution according to the law of Christ, he would thereby commit a grievous sin and make himself again amenable to eternal damnation.

Should not this one advantage alone, therefore, suffice to urge us to the frequent practice of perfect contrition? How easily may we not come into a situation in which perfect contrition is absolutely necessary, so necessary that our eternal salvation may utterly depend upon it? If, as happens to many a one, you should be surprised by death in the state of mortal sin, without the assistance of a priest, there is no other means of salvation for you. How important is it, then, that we daily practise ourselves and have a great facility in this salutary exercise, which may be for us the only means of a happy death!

2. But if one who is already in the state of grace elicits perfect contrition, he receives an *increase of sanc-*

tifying grace, and his soul is rendered more and more beautiful and pleasing in the eyes of God. For, with every act of the love of God which we elicit in perfect contrition, sanctifying grace receives a very special increase, and the inward beauty and sanctity of the soul is greatly enhanced, because the love of God is the most perfect act of Christian virtue, and augments more than all others the inward sanctity of the soul. Were it not, then, an unpardonable recklessness to neglect a practice so important in spiritual life?

3. Besides, perfect contrition always cancels some of the *temporal punishment* due to sin, in greater or less extent, according to the degree of its perfection; and it obtains for us at the same time *greater merit*, that is, a right to a higher degree of glory in heaven. These effects, it is true, are common to all good works that are performed in the state of grace. But perfect contrition, besides being the most perfect act of virtue, has this advantage, that it is not dependent on external circumstances, as are outward penitential and meritorious works; but it is wholly dependent on our free will, and can be elicited at any moment. And if it possesses that degree of purity and intensity to which those who fervently cultivate it may hope to obtain, it may not only lessen the temporal punishment due to our sins, but wholly cancel the entire debt of atonement we owe to the divine justice.

4. The fourth advantage of the exercise of perfect contrition is that it procures us security and *peace of conscience*. For it removes, as far as may be, the fear that we may be still in disfavor with God, a fear which often disturbs even the most pious Christians. For although, according to the teaching of the Holy Ghost, we can never have absolute certainty that we are in the state of grace, yet, as Suarez, one of the greatest

divines and spiritual men, remarks, he who daily makes acts of perfect contrition may be without anxiety, assured that amid so many acts some, at least, will have all the necessary qualities, and have the effect of a full reconciliation with God.

5. Lastly, the practice of perfect contrition leads us to the exercise of *numerous Christian virtues*. To mention only a few, I say that no one can practise perfect contrition without cultivating meekness, patience, and a true spirit of penance. For, when we consider the outrages committed against Almighty God, and conceive a true sorrow for them, we can hardly fail to desire and earnestly endeavor to make some satisfaction to His infinite goodness by voluntary penitential works, or, at least, by meekly and patiently bearing our daily crosses.

These are the chief advantages connected with the exercise of perfect contrition—advantages which you will admit to be of the highest order. In view of these incomparable fruits of perfect contrition, and considering the fact that its practice is not at all difficult, you will certainly at this moment make the firm resolution not to allow a day to pass without eliciting an act of perfect contrition. Take my advice, then, my dear brethren, and make it a constant practice never to retire to rest at night without making from your heart an act of perfect contrition. Thus you will, as far as may be, secure your salvation, and for all eternity thank God for having inspired you to adopt this salutary practice. Amen.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.

HEALING OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

"And they bring to Him one deaf and dumb; and they besought Him that He would lay His hand upon him."—Mark vii. 32.

When our blessed Lord, as you have just heard in the words of the Gospel, in the miraculous cure of this deaf-mute, adopted various ceremonies, which were not at all necessary for His purpose, He did so in order to impress upon us the greatness of another evil, of which the privation of physical hearing and speech is only an outward sign or symbol. For, according to the common teaching of the Fathers, those bodily afflictions, which Our Saviour healed, were figures of the moral maladies of the soul. Thus in this deaf-mute of the Gospel the *spiritual deafness and dumbness* of many sinners are symbolized. The dumbness of one class of sinners consists in the fact that they will not sincerely confess their sins in the tribunal of penance. The deafness of another class of sinners consists in the fact that they do not listen to the voice of their conscience, and, therefore, have no true sorrow for their sins. It is the duty of the physician of souls to cure this twofold malady; and as your spiritual physician I undertake the task to-day to contribute something towards the removal of this twin-evil, which weighs so heavily on many a soul.

For this end I shall treat (1) of the *spiritual dumbness*, and (2) of the *spiritual deafness*, which are wont to take possession of the Christian soul.

I. SPIRITUAL DUMBNESS.

This spiritual dumbness, which consists in the unwillingness to confess one's sins sincerely, is a grievous malady, because it commonly leads to eternal death, that is, to everlasting ruin. In the tribunal of penance the case is very different from that of secular tribunals. In the latter the criminal is condemned if he confesses his crime; in the former he is condemned if he conceals his guilt. You all remember the case of the unhappy Cain, who slew his brother Abel. After committing the crime he heard the voice of God, crying: "Where is thy brother?" (Gen. iv. 9.) But instead of acknowledging his misdeed, Cain sullenly answered: "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" You know the dreadful punishment which God inflicted upon him for this obstinacy. And this may suffice to show you the gravity of this infirmity of the soul. But, in order to cure this disease, it is necessary, as in the case of bodily infirmities, to explore its causes and to remove them from the system. Now, what are the causes of this spiritual dumbness? They are not the same in all cases; in some cases it is false shame, in others it is culpable ignorance that produces this dumbness.

1. To convince the first class, that is, those who labor under *false shame*, of the great folly of their behavior, I would ask them, first of all, whether they intend ever to confess the sins which they have concealed, or not. They will invariably answer that they do intend to confess them sometime, because they know they can otherwise never obtain pardon and save their souls. They put it off, trusting to some future occasion. But who does not see how sadly they deceive themselves? The *difficulty* which now deters them from confessing their sins *will increase* from day to day. For, if they find it hard now to confess that sin, how much harder

will it be after years to confess, in addition, that they have so often concealed that sin; that they have made so many bad confessions, so many sacrilegious Communions! How much greater will be the difficulty, when they shall have to repeat all those confessions, and make a general confession of years, or perhaps of a life-time! Will they ever bring themselves to make such a confession, after their sins and sacrileges have thus accumulated? It is very doubtful, to say the least. Therefore we must not wonder if it often happens that such sinners never come to a good confession, and die in their sins.

But what makes the folly of such sinners altogether inconceivable is the fact that their shame is *utterly groundless*. For otherwise the Holy Ghost would not have expressly admonished us with the words: "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins" (Ecclus. iv. 31). We should be ashamed to commit sin, but not ashamed to confess it after it has once been committed. The sincere and sorrowful confession of our sins is a good work, which is most pleasing to Almighty God, and of which we have no reason to be ashamed. And yet, how often does it happen that sinners confide to their intimate friends the sins which they have been ashamed to confess to the priest in the tribunal of penance, although they well know that the seal of secrecy, by which he is bound, is the most sacred and inviolable!

Very true, they say, there is no danger of revelation; but the *confessor will be surprised* to hear that one committed such enormous sins, and he will lose all love and esteem for the sinner. The confessor surprised! But, my dear friend, are your sins something new and unheard of to him? Has he not often heard similar sins? Has he not heard more grievous sins

than you have to tell him? Does he not know the weakness and corruption of human nature? Does he, too, not bear the germ of sin in his own heart? And if he has been preserved from such grievous sins, does he not know very well that this is not due to his own merits, but to the infinite mercy of God? Your sins, therefore, will not at all surprise him.

But *his respect and esteem for you may be lessened.* Why should they be lessened? Is it because he sees that you have manfully overcome yourself, that you have trampled upon human respect, humbled yourself, and fulfilled a sacred duty, at which the angels of God rejoice and the Heavenly Father Himself is well pleased? Or is it because he sees the boundless confidence which the penitent places in him? No, beloved brethren; if there is anything that can awake the admiration of the confessor and inspire him with love and sympathy for his penitent, it is the candor and simplicity, the sincere and humble confidence with which the sinner discovers the most humiliating diseases and wounds of his soul. It would be the greatest injustice to think otherwise of the confessor; it would be an insult to his better feelings—a belittling of the good sense and tender sympathies which should characterize the minister of God.

2. The second cause of spiritual dumbness, which perhaps is of more frequent occurrence than the former, is ignorance; but, as you must bear in mind, not involuntary and inculpable, but wilful and *sinful ignorance.* This wilful and sinful ignorance arises either from the neglect of the examen of conscience, or from the fact that the penitent disbelieves or disobeys the confessor or lawful pastor of his soul. Both a careful self-examination and docility to the God-appointed spiritual director are strict duties, and, consequently,

the grievous sins that are left out in confession from neglect of these duties are wilfully omitted and render the confessions null and void.

You may think that such unworthy confessions especially arising from disregard to the admonitions of the pastor or confessor are of rare occurrence. But whence comes it that in confession people often make no mention of their old debts; of rents, wages, loans, etc., which they have wilfully neglected to pay, though they had all the necessary means of doing so? Why do they omit to accuse themselves of the neglect of making restitution for ill-gotten goods, or repairing unjust damages? Does this not come from the fact that they try to make themselves believe that they may defer the payment of their debts and the fulfilment of the duty of restitution indefinitely, provided they have the intention some time or other, at their own convenience, to discharge the obligation? But is this not manifestly culpable ignorance, after they have repeatedly been told in the confessional and from the pulpit that such is not the case? Whence comes it that so many parents never accuse themselves of the liberties they allow their sons and daughters in regard to company-keeping, secret meetings, dances, and other dangerous amusements? Does this not come from their disregarding or disbelieving the warnings of those who are the representatives of God in their regard? Whence comes it that many married people pass over in silence certain things which their conscience tells them are not lawful? Is that not affected and sinful ignorance? Is it not their duty, in that case, at least to ask the confessor and follow his decision?

Such are the causes of that pernicious spiritual dumbness—false shame and sinful ignorance. Guard against this twofold poisonous source of temporal and eternal

misery. But if there are such who have been already smitten with this spiritual dumbness, let their tongues be loosed by the touch of the divine grace that Jesus Christ, the physician of their souls, extends to them; let them come, then, and make a general confession of their sins; and, like the deaf-mute in the Gospel, they will return, rejoicing and praising God for the wondrous works He shall have done to them.

II. SPIRITUAL DEAFNESS.

Spiritual deafness, which consists in the disregard of the voice of conscience, and the consequent lack of sorrow for one's sins, is likewise a very serious disease of the soul. For it also makes confession invalid, and thus exposes the soul to the imminent danger of eternal death. The chief obstacle which stands in the way of the recovery of those afflicted with this malady is the fact that they do not realize the danger of their state. I shall, therefore, briefly review the different classes of those who are affected with this spiritual deafness, whence each one may easily judge for himself how he stands in this regard.

1. The first class that occurs to me is that of those who in the tribunal of penance, instead of accusing themselves and acknowledging their guilt, try to *excuse themselves* and throw all the blame upon others. Permit me to give a few instances to characterize this class of spiritually deaf penitents. There comes a married woman and confesses that she has quarrelled with her husband, abused and cursed him; but she does not fail to add that he has given her great cause; for he comes home drunk at night, curses and swears, brings the whole house into confusion, and gives grave scandal to the children. Next comes the husband; he accuses himself of drinking, and of spending the time and

money which he should devote to the welfare of his family on drink and gambling; but, he adds, my wife is in fault; she is ill-tempered and quarrelsome; there is no living with her; and that's what drives me to the drink-shop and gambling-table. A servant, or laborer, accuses himself of stealing from his master or employer, but adds that he receives too little pay, much less than his services are worth. A young woman acknowledges the sins committed against holy purity, but throws the whole blame on the other party, after she has wilfully exposed herself to the occasion of sin and to all its consequences. But how stands it with the contrition of such penitents? Is it not, to say the very least, extremely doubtful whether they have any true sorrow for their sins? Do they not act just as did our first parents, who, instead of reflecting on the gravity of their sin, tried to excuse themselves by throwing the blame upon others?

2. The second class of spiritually deaf Christians are those who repent of their sins from mere *temporal motives*. Such are likewise deaf to the voice of conscience, which teaches us to abhor and condemn sin from higher motives—those motives which our holy faith holds out to us. Thus many a one is sorry for the theft committed, but only from fear of being detected and punished. Thus it may happen that a young woman will accuse herself amid bitter tears of her transgressions, but the motive of her sorrow is nothing but the fear of impending disgrace. And so there are many who repent of their sins from no other motive than because these have brought upon them a temporal loss, whether of health, fortune, honor, or happiness. But since a merely natural sorrow for sin is not sufficient for the worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance, the confessions of such Christians must be invalid.

3. A third class of spiritually deaf Christians consists of those who *are unwilling to comply with certain obligations*, which the confessor is obliged to impose upon them. One who has given grievous offence to his neighbor refuses to make any satisfaction to him. A second tries all means to escape the obligation of restoring ill-gotten property, or repairing unjust damages. A third is unwilling to remove and repair scandal given. A fourth will not abandon the proximate occasion of sin, for instance, dangerous company-keeping, drinking-houses, bad companions, disreputable places, the society of those who are given to loose, immoral, or blasphemous conversation. Such penitents cannot possibly have a true sorrow for their sins; they are deaf to the voice of conscience and the voice of God, who speaks to them through His representatives.

From what I have said, beloved brethren, every one of you may fairly judge whether he is, or is not, affected with this lamentable spiritual deafness. Those who find themselves free from this dreadful evil (as I am convinced that most of you are, with God's grace) must make it their earnest endeavor, also in future, to keep themselves rid of it; and, therefore, when preparing themselves for confession, they must listen to, and follow the voice of their conscience, as it speaks to them illumined by the light of faith. But those who have found out that they have been smitten with this disease—whether it was that, instead of accusing, they tried to excuse themselves; or that they have been sorry for their sins only from natural motives; or that they have refused to comply with the obligations imposed by the confessor—those should, first of all, thank God from their hearts that He has given them the grace to know the sad state of their souls. But this is not enough, my dear friends; they must also, in order

to regain the health of their souls, repair the bad or doubtful confessions they have made by a good, sincere, and contrite general confession of their sins. Do this for the security of your immortal souls, and those who are on the right way will secure for themselves the grace of perseverance; and those who have strayed from the true path will again find it; and all of you will, despite the many errors and sins of which you may have been guilty, safely arrive at the goal of this earthly pilgrimage, and merit the unfading crown which God has promised to those who persevere to the end. Amen.

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.

SLANDER.

"Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?"—Luke x. 25.

From the answer which our blessed Lord gives to this question of the lawyer we see that for the attainment of eternal life it is not enough to love God, but that it is necessary to love also our neighbor. The reason is because we cannot truly love God without at the same time loving our neighbor, who is God's image and likeness. Or can we truly love God and, at the same time, hate His likeness? Therefore St. John says: "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not? And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God love also his brother" (I. John iv. 20, 21). Now, the first thing which this love of our neighbor demands of us is that we avoid all that could in any way injure our neighbor, and that we do so the more carefully, in proportion to the greatness of the injury to be feared. But the greatest injury to our neighbor is that which is committed against that possession which he most values, that is, against his honor and good name. And to this class of injuries belongs, in the first instance, *slander*. Therefore I have chosen this sin as the subject of to-day's discourse, with the view to inspire you with an intense and lasting hatred against it. For this purpose I will put before

you two very strong motives, which are well suited to awaken in you a thorough detestation of this vice—

1. *Its debasing character in itself;*
2. *The guilt it heaps on the sinner's conscience.*

I. ITS DEGRADING CHARACTER.

The characteristic feature of slander, beloved brethren—that which distinguishes it in the catalogue of vices—is the vile and degrading meanness which is peculiar to it. For what is slander? It is defamation of our neighbor by attributing faults to him which he has not. He who falsely attributes a defaming quality to his neighbor or magnifies his real failings is a slanderer. But such a one gives evidence of a vile and ignoble mind. In order to perceive clearly the base character of the slanderer, let us briefly consider the *circumstances* of his vile action.

1. Who is the *person slandered?* He is either the friend, or the enemy of the slanderer, or he is indifferent to him, that is, neither a friend nor an enemy. Now, in any case, the slanderer's action against him is most ignoble. And, in the first place, is it not a most vile thing to bring a *friend* into disrepute, contempt, suspicion, without the least provocation? Is it not a most treacherous outrage upon his love and friendship? Does it not display the meanest and most contemptible sentiments in the slanderer? But if the person slandered is an *enemy*, this is no extenuation in favor of the slanderer. For the vile attack which is then made upon the character of the slandered party is nothing else than revenge, and is, consequently, a most ignoble deed. Or, is it noble or magnanimous to take revenge? Is it honorable to allow one's self to be carried away by pride and passion? Is it not, on the contrary, the vilest slavery? Revenge, in

any case, is an ignoble action; revenge by calumny is a deed of the most servile cowardice. Lastly, if the person slandered is neither a friend nor an enemy, but *indifferent* to the slanderer, the latter inflicts the keenest wound on one who has not given him the slightest pretext or provocation, makes a foul onslaught on one who has never done him any wrong, throws a stain upon the character of one who, according to his own acknowledgment, has an unblemished reputation. Is this not the vilest and foulest treatment? Is it not vile and foul in the highest degree thus, without cause or pretext, to injure the character and hurt the feelings of an inoffensive neighbor?

2. The *arms used* in this foul onslaught are of the vilest quality—arms which no man of honor or character would wield—lying, defamatory speech. Has not the use of such means been always and everywhere considered dishonorable? Has it not been condemned by divine and human law? These are weapons of the devil's own invention and manufacture. It was he who first brought them into the world, and employed them against God Himself, when he seduced our first parents in Paradise with his poisonous tongue. The man or woman, therefore, who has once used the venomous darts of calumny has renounced all claim to honor and respect and incurred the stain of everlasting reproach.

3. And *what time* does the dastardly slanderer choose for his deadly assault? It is when his victim's back is turned; in his absence, when he is unable to defend himself. But is it not a vile and cowardly practice even for an enemy to choose such a moment, like a cowardly murderer, to strike in the dark, or behind the back of his adversary?

4. But the consummation of meanness may be seen in the *manner* in which the slanderer deals his deadly

blow. Dreading nothing so much as contradiction, he has recourse to tactics which fully bear out the vileness of his character. He speaks apparently with the greatest circumspection, as if anxious to preserve the good reputation of him whom he is defaming; he speaks under the seal of *secrecy*. By this policy he tries to save his own credit, while the evil report, as he very well knows, is sure to obtain circulation. Therefore the Holy Ghost compares him with the serpent, which stings without noise: "If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better that backbiteth secretly" (Eccles. x. 11).

Another device, no less hateful and contemptible, which the slanderer uses to cloak his malice and insinuate himself with his hearers, is *wit and jest*. He clothes his calumny in the garb of wit and humor, to raise a laugh and gain the applause of his listeners. He will sometimes say a word of sympathy of his victim, and express his regret that such a thing should be true of him; nay, to make the impression of fairness, and thus gain credence, he will mete out some slight share of praise to the subject of his calumny, which, however, will only tend to put him in a more unfavorable light and, if possible, to make him more contemptible in the eyes of the by-standers.

A third device, which caps the climax of the slanderer's meanness, is that he, by no means rarely, manages to surround himself with an apparent *halo of virtue*. He convinces those present that it is not hatred nor envy, but the purest motive of charity, zeal for the good cause in question, or at least righteous indignation that influences him to speak out what he would fain conceal. Such people, he says, must be revealed some time; their own good and the public weal demand imperatively that such characters should be

branded with public infamy. Therefore the private and public weal demand that the eighth commandment of God should be trampled under foot, that the image of God, that is imprinted on our neighbor, should be dragged down into the dust! What an unspeakable vileness is manifested in such behavior! What devilish hypocrisy! What hellish malice!

Whatever view we may take of slander, therefore, it manifests itself as a most shameful and degrading vice. It is evident, then, that its distinctive feature is its baseness, by which it makes itself conspicuous in the line of vices. Besides, as I have said, there is no other sin that weighs heavier on the sinner's conscience than that of slander.

II. HOW IT BURDENS THE SINNER'S CONSCIENCE.

The sins of injustice lay a much heavier burden upon the conscience of the sinner than any other class of sins. The reason is, because these sins involve greater obligations of satisfaction on the part of the sinner. Other sins impose the duty of satisfaction only towards God: the duties of contrition, confession, penance; these require also satisfaction to our neighbor--the *restitution* of the goods of which our neighbor has been unjustly deprived, or the *reparation* of the damages wilfully inflicted upon him. Therefore the sins of injustice weigh heavier upon the soul than other sins. But among the sins of injustice there is none that weighs so heavily upon the sinner's conscience as that of slander. And why?

Because it induces the obligation of *repairing our neighbor's honor*, which has been injured by the slanderer. That the sin of slander entails this obligation on the slanderer there can be no reasonable doubt. For, if there is a strict obligation, under grievous sin

and the loss of our eternal salvation, to repair any considerable damage done to our neighbor's property, how much greater is the obligation of making reparation for the injury inflicted on his honor, which is of incomparably greater value in his eyes than all his temporal goods. Slander, therefore, induces the strict obligation of restoring the honor or good name of the person slandered; and therefore I say that it lays a heavier burden on the sinner's conscience than any other sin of injustice. The reasons are the following—

1. It is generally *more difficult* to repair injured honor than any other damage. For the honor of our neighbor cannot be repaired without considerable sacrifice of honor on the part of the slanderer, just as the reparation of material damages cannot be effected without some diminution of the culprit's own property. Or can the honor of the person slandered be otherwise repaired than by a retractation and acknowledgment on the part of the slanderer that he has said an untruth? Certainly not; there is no other means of making reparation. If, therefore, the calumny has been uttered in the presence of one person, the retractation must be made before the same person; or, at least, in such a way that it will surely come to the knowledge of that person. If the slander has taken place before twenty persons, or before the public at large, the retractation must be made before these twenty persons, or before the public at large. Now, it is manifest that this cannot be done without some sacrifice of honor on the part of the slanderer. And yet it is a much more difficult thing to sacrifice one's honor than one's property. It is certain, therefore, that the sin of slander lays a heavier obligation on the sinner than any other of the sins against justice, which may be repaired by a material compensation.

2. *No circumstance can excuse* the slanderer from making reparation. For reparation of honor is an act which depends totally upon a man's free will, not on any external circumstances. Such is not the case with regard to the restitution of material goods; this does not always depend on man's free will, but on many external circumstances. If a man, for instance, has nothing, he cannot make restitution, and is, therefore, excused until he has bettered his condition. But such an inability can never occur in case of the slanderer, since he is always in a position to retract his slander, such an act depending solely on his free will. For him, therefore, there is no excuse.

3. Calumny, besides the reparation of injured honor, often involves *other grave duties* towards the calumniated parties; and this is another reason why it weighs so heavily on the conscience of the sinner. For slander may produce countless other sad results, which, according to the teaching of divines, are so many heavy burdens laid on the slanderer's conscience. For instance, a person of unblemished character is on the point of entering an honorable and happy alliance, when by the tongue of slander she becomes the victim of evil report. The connection is severed, and her honor, and fortune, and happiness for life are utterly ruined. Another possesses an honorable and lucrative position, when an evil report is spread concerning him, which compels him to abandon his situation, and deprives him of all hopes of obtaining a similar one. A third, who has a thriving business, is falsely accused of dishonesty. The result is that he loses his patronage; his business goes down, and he is compelled to make an assignment. And how often does it not happen that by slanderous talk the peace and good understanding between husband and wife are destroyed, the education of their children

jeopardized, and their domestic happiness ruined for life? And all these evils the slanderer is strictly bound, to the best of his ability, to repair. Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, are these not heavy burdens on the conscience of the slanderer—burdens from which every conscientious Christian soul must shrink with horror?

Hence you see, my dear friends, how detestable the sin of slander is, since it is so unspeakably vile in its character, and lays such an unbearable burden on the sinner's conscience. If, then, your honor, and the peace of your conscience, and your salvation itself are dear to you, beware of slander. Make at this moment the unshaken resolution henceforth to say only what is good of your neighbors, or, if you know nothing good of them, to say nothing. If you keep this resolve you will keep your souls free from this dreadful weight and preserve yourselves from this terrible responsibility. Thus you will also smoothe the way to a peaceful and happy death; for whoever can say to himself at the hour of death that he has not sinned in word against his neighbor may console himself with the hope that he has kept the commandment of charity, which is the fulfilment of the law and the earnest of everlasting life. Amen.

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

EFFECTS OF FAITH.

"And He said to him: Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole."—Luke xvii. 19.

FROM these words it is manifest that Our Lord attributed the miraculous cure, worked in favor of the leper, to the *faith* of the latter: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." And this is no isolated case in which our blessed Saviour makes this same declaration. Almost in every instance in which He works a miracle in behalf of an individual sufferer, He ascribes it to the faith of him in whose favor the cure was wrought. He does this manifestly to show us what importance He attaches to faith, and what a prominent part faith acts in the work of our salvation. It is upon this influence of faith upon the work of our salvation that I would dwell to-day. This subject will afford me an opportunity of unfolding to you some of the most fundamental and, at the same time, the most momentous principles of our holy religion, and will contribute not a little towards increasing your appreciation of the divine virtue of faith. The effects of faith in the work of our salvation can be reduced to two, which may be summed up in the one proposition: *Faith saves, and faith condemns.* This statement seems strange, if not contradictory, at first sight; yet it is most true; for, as I shall show you, it is faith (1) that *saves the just man*, and (2) that *condemns the sinner.*

I. FAITH SAVES THE JUST MAN.

It is to their faith that the just ultimately owe their salvation. For what gives them a right to eternal happiness and effects their salvation, are, according to the teachings of the Church, next to the grace of God, their own *meritorious works*. But it is faith that enables us to perform meritorious works. And this it does in two ways. In the first place, the grace of God always supposed, it renders our works meritorious; and, in the second place, it urges us to the performance of good and meritorious works.

1. It is faith that *makes our works meritorious*. Works which are of themselves good and laudable have no supernatural value before God, no real worth for heaven, unless they are performed in the spirit of faith, that is, from supernatural motives taken from faith; or, to use the expression of the Apostle, unless they bear the impress or stamp of faith upon them. St. Chrysostom, to explain this necessity of faith for the supernatural merit of good works, uses the following comparison. As a coin, no matter how precious it may be, has no currency in business, unless it bear the stamp of the sovereign, or of public authority, so our good works, without this supernatural impress of faith, have no currency for the kingdom of heaven.

This is the express *teaching of the Apostle St. Paul*. Thus he argues with the Jews. You imagine, he says to them, that the observance of the law will make you partakers of the promises of Abraham, and secure your salvation. But this is not the case. It is not the observance of the law but the faith of Jesus Christ which will save you. All the rites and ceremonies of the law will be of no avail to you, unless you are sanctified by the faith of Christ. Thus it is faith by which you are made just. It is faith that

will procure for you access to God. For "without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6).

The same is the *teaching of St. Augustine.* Mere naturally good works, he says, have no value in regard to our salvation. God will take no account of them in eternity. It is upon faith that He has made the whole merit of our good works depend; and without faith nothing can lead us to Him. And in this teaching *the Fathers* of the Church are unanimous. In all ages there have been heretics, who gloried in their good works, and flattered themselves that they led a life more holy, more regular, more devoted to works of piety, penance, and charity, than we Catholics. To these self-sufficient zealots the Fathers invariably answered that, even though all this were true, yet their works gave them no right to heaven, because faith was wanting to them, and without faith all their works were dead, and all their virtues were only apparent virtues. Hence it is manifest that it is faith which ultimately saves us, because without faith our works, however good they may be, cannot be meritorious.

2. But faith, secondly, saves us by *urging us to the performance of good works.* It is a well known fact that, as soon as any one receives the gift of faith, he feels himself urged on to do the works of faith. In fact, all that we do for God is done in consequence of our faith, and is in exact proportion to our faith. He who has much faith does much for God, performs many good works, practises many Christian virtues. He who has little faith is lukewarm, and does little for God; and he who has no faith does nothing for God, performs no meritorious actions, exercises no Christian virtues. This being the case, it necessarily follows, as

also the Apostle teaches us, that all other virtues are subordinate to the virtue of faith, and receive from it their activity and efficacy.

Nay, the Apostle goes even further. In the epistle to the Galatians he speaks of "faith, that *worketh by charity*" (Gal. v. 6). According to the teaching of the Apostle, therefore, it is not charity that worketh by faith, but faith by charity. Hence he that loves God by charity, he that loves his neighbor, forgives injuries, performs works of mercy by charity, does all this in virtue of his faith. It is faith that worketh in him by charity. It is as if charity were the handmaid of faith, had no peculiar functions of her own but to do the works of faith. Therefore the Apostle does not hesitate to ascribe the grandest acts of virtue performed by the patriarchs of the Old Law to the virtue of faith. Thus by faith, he says, Abel offered to God a sacrifice exceeding that of Cain, by which he obtained a testimony that he was just. By faith Abraham resolved to sacrifice his son; by faith Moses left Egypt, despising the favor of Pharao, and not fearing his fury. In all these magnificent acts of virtue charity, of course, was active; but, as St. Chrysostom remarks, it was the charity that is inflamed by faith. And therefore Holy Scripture says of Abraham that his faith was reputed to him unto justice (Rom. iv. 9). It is, therefore, faith that works through the other Christian virtues. It is faith that operates when we love God and our neighbor, whereby we fulfil the whole law; for this is the fulfilment of the law. Is it not evident, then, that our salvation is ultimately the work of faith?

But you will, perhaps, say: if this is the case, if faith has such power and efficacy in regard to our salvation, how comes it that among believing Christians there are so many who lead an un-Christian life and lose

their souls? The chief reason is, without doubt, that there are many calling themselves Christians who are not such in the full sense of the word, because they either have no faith, or have but little faith, or have not the true faith. But another no less patent reason is that there are not a few Christians who possess the true faith, but live as if they possessed it not. For although faith strongly urges us to the practice of good works, yet it does not necessitate us. It does no violence to the will, but leaves it free to disregard its admonitions. We must not wonder, then, that there are Christians who allow themselves to be ruled rather by the principles of this world than by the teachings of faith. But such are not saved by faith, as I shall presently show you; it is such that faith condemns.

II. FAITH CONDEMNS THE SINNER.

If we neglect to live according to the dictates of our holy faith the same will once arise in judgment against us.

1. *Why so?* The reason is manifest. By this reckless disregard of the principles of our faith we treat it with the vilest contempt; for he who, despite the light of faith, leads an un-Christian life offers a twofold flagrant outrage to this divine gift.

a. First, by such behavior he *fetters*, as it were, makes a slave and a prisoner of this infused virtue, because he prevents it from working in the soul according to the intention of God. If, then, you lead an impure, or intemperate, or dishonest life, you put your faith in chains, deprive it of its activity, make it the slave of your tyrannical passions. While it has the power and the destiny to make you pure and temperate and honest, you thwart its efficacy, and make it inactive. Therefore St. Paul says in his epistle to the

Romans (i. 18) of those who know God and refuse to honor Him, who know the law of God and neglect to keep it, that they detain, as it were, in captivity the truth of God, that is, their holy faith; and that they detain it in injustice, which is the basest captivity. For, while faith is pure, and holy, and divine in its nature, the sinner forces it to dwell in a heart which is defiled by unclean and loathsome vices. And what makes this outrage still greater is the fact that this disgraceful captivity of faith takes place even in our own peaceful days, when such facilities are offered of living up to its teachings. In the early days of Christianity, says St. Bernard, when persecutions raged and the Christians languished in chains, faith was free. In prison and fetters the Christian martyrs loudly proclaimed without fear, in the face of ruthless tyrants, the faith which they cherished in their hearts. And now, when the Church enjoys peace, faith is bound in fetters, and (alas for shame!) bound not by tyrants, but enslaved by Christians!

b. The second outrage which we inflict upon our faith, when we neglect to live according to its maxims is that we *deprive it of its choicest fruits.* These priceless fruits of faith are good works; for, as I have shown you, faith is the fountain of all virtues, the root from which the works of salvation spring and derive their life, increase, and maturity. We have an instance in the virtues and heroic works of the saints: in their unceasing prayer, rigorous penance, untiring labors in the Lord's vineyard; in short, in the works of Christian perfection, which they continued to practise with unflagging perseverance to the last moment of their lives. Behold, these are the fruits of faith! These same fruits it might produce in us, did we not prevent it. For, though our fervor may have relaxed, and our

good works may have declined, yet the power of faith in itself has remained the same. What, then, do we do when we neglect to live up to our faith? We blight its precious fruits in the bud, make it barren and fruitless. Yea, according to the Apostle St. James, we kill our faith in a certain sense; for, according to him, the life and soul of faith consist in good works. "As the body without the spirit is dead," he says, "so also faith without works is dead" (James ii. 26). And is this not a most unworthy treatment of the divine gift of faith? May we not justly expect, then, that our faith, if it be so outraged by us in life, will once arise in judgment against us, and condemn us before God's awful tribunal?

2. But *in what manner* will faith condemn the sinner? By appearing as his accuser before the all-just judgment-seat of God, and by compelling him to acknowledge his own guilt.

In the first place, it will bear testimony against him that he *could* have lived a Christian life. It will testify against us that we had all the necessary means; that we possessed sufficient knowledge and ample supernatural aid: sufficient knowledge, because faith itself shed its radiant light upon us; ample aid from on high, because the Church of God continually opened the fountains of grace for us.

Our faith will bear witness against us that we *should* have led a Christian life. It will remind us of the solemn promises we made in baptism through our sponsors, and renewed personally after we came to the use of reason and clearly saw the duties we owed to Almighty God. Faith has clearly held up to us the binding force of those promises and all our obligations to God, to our neighbors, and to ourselves, so that we were thoroughly convinced, and must acknowledge

to ourselves and before God that it was our strict duty to live up to the dictates of our holy faith.

Faith will, finally, *convict the sinner* of not having lived a Christian life. For it will contrast the life he led with the principles of faith which he believed, and show the contradiction that existed between them—on the one hand, a faith which professes contempt for the goods of this world; on the other hand, a life whose prime motive was avarice, whose means was injustice; a faith that teaches us to humble ourselves and flee the dangerous honors of this world, and a life that sought nothing more eagerly than self-glorification and the applause of men; a faith that teaches us that we must deny ourselves and bear the cross of Christ, and a life spent in luxury, enjoyments, and sensual pleasures. Thus faith will convict the sinner of his un-Christian life. The verdict which faith must pronounce upon the sinner is that of guilty; and that verdict will be ratified by the all-just Judge. For, is it not the blackest guilt on the part of the Christian if he does nothing of what faith and his conscience teach him, and does everything they forbid? What can be the sentence pronounced upon a Christian, thus accused and convicted, other than that of condemnation without mercy?

Now, what follows from all this, beloved brethren? It follows evidently that faith will of necessity either save or condemn us; that it will be to us either the cause of eternal, incomprehensible happiness, or of never-ending, unutterable woe. But the choice lies wholly with ourselves. If we live as faith requires of us, faith will be our salvation; if we neglect to follow its teaching, it will be our condemnation. Which will you choose? O you, my dear friend, whose life is in such glaring contradiction with your faith, who seek your

happiness on this earth, while you neglect your eternal welfare; who seek only earthly goods and earthly enjoyments, and spurn the treasures and joys of heaven; will you continue your reckless career? Will you turn your faith, which is your best friend and your greatest blessing, into an implacable enemy and an inevitable curse? Will you change this gift of God, that was given for your salvation, into the cause of eternal reprobation? Forbid it God! Listen, then, my dear friend, in future to the voice of faith, and let its maxims be the rule of your life. And let us all, my brethren, be renewed in our faith to-day, and henceforth live according to its teachings, that before the judgment-seat of God it may appear, not as our accuser, but as our friend and defender, and secure for us the merciful sentence of everlasting life. Amen.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

INJUSTICE.

"Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you."—Matt. vi. 33.

WITH these words our blessed Saviour would give us to understand that we should, in the first instance, seek the honor of God and our own salvation, and only secondarily to this the necessaries of the present life. Our efforts for the attainment of temporal possessions must, therefore, at all times be subordinate to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls. Contrary to this principle are wont to act all those who, engrossed in temporal concerns, neglect the business of their salvation: prayer, divine service, frequenting the holy sacraments, and other Christian duties. But much more grievously do they sin against this precept of our Divine Lord who allow themselves to be so blinded by their greed for worldly wealth as altogether to lose sight of the service due to God and the work of their eternal salvation; who, to enrich themselves, do not hesitate by unjust means to appropriate their neighbor's goods, and make themselves guilty of the sin of injustice. Such Christians evidently not only subordinate, but entirely sacrifice the honor of God and their own salvation to vile, temporal gain. Therefore, to put you on your guard against such criminal and ruinous behavior, I would earnestly admonish you of the serious and by no means uncommon dangers of the vice of injustice.

For this end I shall endeavor to show you—

1. *How easy it is to appropriate our neighbor's goods;*
2. *How hard it is to make restitution of them;*
3. *That restitution is, nevertheless, a necessary duty.*

I. IT IS EASY TO APPROPRIATE OUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS.

According to the teaching of St. Chrysostom, there are two causes in particular which mislead man to the appropriation of his neighbor's goods, viz., inward concupiscence and the outward occasion.

1. In the struggle for temporal gain, as a matter of fact, most people are not guided by the inspiration of grace, by the light of reason, or by the principles of the natural law, but only by passion, by *concupiscence*, or that immoderate greed, by which, according to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, "every man is tempted, drawn away, and allured" (James i. 14). This concupiscence, which we have all inherited, is insatiable in its demands. All that is done to gratify it only increases its cravings. Hence it may be understood why so few are satisfied with their actual possessions, and why most people are irresistibly urged on to increase their wealth. And if they allow themselves to be ruled by concupiscence, there is nothing easier than to fall into unjust practices. In fact, concupiscence, in order to gain its object, does not shrink from any wile or artifice, not even from any crime. Is it not this concupiscence that has taught men to adulterate goods, to use false weights and measures? Is it not concupiscence that has invented usury, sham contracts, deceitful assignments, and all manner of swindle and dishonest practices? Is it not this insatiable greed which weakens mutual confidence, endangers business, brings ruin upon families and whole communities, breeds enmities, and urges men to murder and other horrible crimes? With this monstrous passion raging in his

heart, what is easier than that a man should be driven to appropriate his neighbor's goods?

2. And if a man once loses control of himself so far as to be influenced by this passion, there is no lack of *external opportunities.* These opportunities arise from the manifold intercourse of man with man, and are most numerous. How many such occasions are daily offered to servants and laborers, to whose trust masters and employers must confide many things? How many such occasions are offered to managers and business agents, whose dealings are uncontrolled, and who enjoy their employers' unlimited confidence? And how numerous are the occasions offered to merchants, public officials, physicians, judges, lawyers, etc.? I will not speak of those who borrow money and run into debts without any prospect of ever paying them. From what I have said you see that, besides what is generally termed theft, there are countless opportunities of unjust appropriation.

Since, then, the innate greed of man is so strong, and the occasions of gratifying it are so numerous, must we not acknowledge that it is a very easy thing to fall into the sin of injustice? But, easy as it is to commit injustice, it is a very difficult thing to repair it by adequate restitution when once committed, as I shall presently show you.

II. IT IS HARD TO MAKE RESTITUTION.

That it is no easy matter to make restitution for ill-gotten goods is manifest from the very fact that, notwithstanding the many dishonesties which are daily practised, *we rarely meet with a case of restitution.* If restitution were so easy a matter, it certainly would be performed more frequently, considering the frequency of unjust dealings, frauds, and all manner of dishonesty.

But this, we know, is far from being the case. How seldom do we hear of a case of restitution! How many do we find, I will not say among thieves and house-breakers, but among dishonest servants and laborers, swindling business men, public officials, deceitful physicians and lawyers, etc., who have made any restitution for what they have unjustly swindled or pressed from their unwary and unsuspecting neighbors?

The same difficulty manifests itself when there is question of paying *just debts.* Here we have often occasion to see how hard it is even for rich people to part with their neighbor's goods. How many difficulties do they not raise? How many excuses and vain pretexts do they not advance? To what artful expedients have they not recourse? How is the creditor's patience tampered with, when he sees himself put off from month to month, from year to year, on the pretence of want of cash; while ready money is forthcoming for all other possible purposes—for luxuries, expensive entertainments and amusements, drink and dissipation! Is this not, again, a striking evidence of the difficulty of restoring our neighbor's property?

Yea, beloved brethren, this difficulty is so great that it often forms the *chief obstacle to conversion.* It is this difficulty which often stifles the voice of conscience in the sinner, holds him fettered in the bonds of Satan, and finally brings on his eternal ruin. This is by no means of rare occurrence, nor is it anything new. The case was familiar to St. Augustine. It sometimes happens, he says, that sinners whose conscience is burdened with the guilt of appropriating their neighbor's goods hasten to the church, cast themselves at the feet of the priest, and with tears accuse themselves of their sins. To judge from their behavior, one would think

they were in the best disposition, and fully resolved to return to God. But when the priest, as his duty requires of him, demands that they restore the ill-gotten goods, their tears all at once cease to flow, and they adopt a very different language. Till then they listened to the confessor with all due reverence as the representative of God, took his admonitions in good part, and were ready to comply with all his demands. So far everything he said seemed to them to be reasonable, just, and even easy to comply with. But as soon as he declares to them the obligation of restoring their neighbor's goods, and insists upon this duty, despite all their vain excuses, he ceases to be looked upon by them as the vice-gerent of God. They now consider him a harsh and unreasonable man, break off their confession, as they say, to go in search of a milder and what they call a more reasonable confessor. And why all this? For no other reason than because they cannot be resolved to part with their neighbor's goods; so difficult it is to make restitution of ill-gotten goods.

But, my dear brethren, is that not a most powerful motive for us to guard against a sin which is so hard to repair? But what adds still more force to this motive is the fact that restitution, however difficult it may be, is an indispensable duty, which we cannot neglect without forfeiting our eternal salvation. This obligation is the third and last point which I desire to put before you.

III. RESTITUTION IS NECESSARY.

When I say that it is necessary for salvation to repair by restitution the unjust damages done to our neighbor's property, I mean, of course, only those cases in which the damage is considerable—so considerable that it amounts to a *grievous sin*. Besides, I

speak only of the case in which it is *possible* for him who inflicted the damage to make reparation. For, when the damage is a trifling one, though the party who inflicted it is in conscience bound so repair it, yet this obligation does not bind under grievous sin. And if restitution is impossible, the obligation is suspended as long as the impossibility continues. In all other cases restitution is absolutely necessary for salvation. Why? Because this obligation is indispensable—indispensable on the part of the priest, who imposes it on the penitent, and on the part of God Himself, who must exact it.

1. It is *indispensable on the part of the priest.* He can in no case relieve the penitent from this duty. God, it is true, has given to the priest, as His representative on earth, most extensive powers. By the power of priestly orders and of jurisdiction imparted to him, he may, in many cases, dispense from the holiest laws of the Church; he may, in certain cases, dispense from the obligations of an oath or a vow; he may absolve from the most heinous sins and crimes, and even, in many instances, from the severest ecclesiastical censures and penalties; but, however great may be the powers with which he is invested, he can in no case dispense from the obligation of restoring unjustly acquired property, or repairing unjustly inflicted damage. This is the universal teaching of divines; and the reason is, because no man, in whatever power he may be placed, is allowed to violate the right of a third party. If the priest would dispense one from paying his just debt, or repairing the damage done to his neighbor, he would manifestly violate the right of the creditor, or of the party on whom the damage was unjustly inflicted, which can never be lawful in any case.

2. The duty of restitution is likewise *indispensable on*

the part of God. God, who is the author of human society, can never permit anything which imperils its existence. But who does not see that the very existence of human society would be endangered by the removal of this duty? If the obligation of restoring our neighbor's property were abolished, society would lose one of its main stays, the security of property. And, in fact, if it were possible to regain the grace of God and the right to eternal salvation without the restitution of ill-gotten goods, or, at least, in case of impossibility, the earnest will to make restitution, would not avaricious man be exposed to the greatest temptation of unjustly appropriating more and more of his neighbor's property? What security would further remain for property? If, notwithstanding the strict duty of restitution, which is generally admitted, so much injustice and dishonesty is practised, how would it be in the case that man were totally relieved from this restraint? Hence it is that not even Almighty God can dispense from the duty of restitution.

It is plain, then, beloved brethren, from what I have said, that ill-gotten goods are a most efficacious means in the hands of the devil to lead men to their eternal destruction. This is a bait which he casts out to them to allure them into his net, that he may drag them into everlasting ruin. For, if it is so easy to appropriate our neighbor's goods, and yet so difficult to restore them, and if this restitution, as we have seen, is an indispensable duty, it is manifest that the evil one can by no other means so easily and effectually lead men to their ruin as by bringing them by one of its various channels into the vice of injustice. Should, therefore, any one amongst you, beloved brethren, allured by this bait of Satan, have brought into his possession what is not his, let him hasten to restore it while he can, before

the difficulty increases; let him shake the burden from his conscience and extricate himself from the bonds in which Satan has fettered him. And let us all henceforth guard against all manner of injustice, that we may secure the blessing and friendship of God, and the peace of our hearts, and the joyous hope of the possession of the infinite and everlasting riches of God's kingdom. Amen.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

SIN.

"And He said: Young man, I say to thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother." —Luke vii. 14, 15.

ACCORDING to the interpretation of St. Augustine, the mother of the dead youth of whom the Gospel speaks is a figure of the Church, and her dead son a symbol of every one of the Church's children whose soul is spiritually dead by mortal sin. What aroused the sympathy of our blessed Lord, therefore, was not merely the grief of this desolate widow of Naim, but chiefly the sorrow of the Church, His beloved spouse, at the loss of her children. We cannot, therefore, give greater joy to our dear Saviour than by converting sinners and restoring them to the arms of their sorrowing mother, the Church. It was this motive which induced me to take *sin* as the subject of my discourse to-day, in the hope of strengthening the good in the supernatural life of grace, and bringing those who are still in their sins, whose souls are sunk in the sleep of spiritual death, to a good confession, and thereby restoring them to the spiritual life of their souls. And for this end I find no more efficacious means than the simple exposition of the nature of sin. What I purpose to show you, then, is that *sin is the greatest of all evils*, the evil of evils, an evil in every regard—*both in regard to God and in our regard.*

I. THE GREATEST EVIL IN REGARD TO GOD.

Sin is the greatest evil in regard to God, because it is a *rebellion* against His divine majesty. Mortal sin, of which there is question here, is a deliberate and voluntary transgression of a commandment of God in an important matter. It is, therefore, the refusal of the obedience due to God, our supreme Lord, a revolt against God's authority. But a revolt against God is manifestly an enormous crime.

1. The enormity of a revolt depends upon the *relation which exists between the superior and inferior.* The higher the superior and the lower the inferior is, the greater is the outrage of a revolt. The more sacred the right of the superior is, the more crying is the injustice of the inferior; the greater the benevolence of the lord has been, the more glaring is the ingratitude of the servant. But who is the lord, and who the servant in our case? God is the lord, and man the servant; God is the superior, man the inferior.

a. Who is God, and who is man? *God is greatness incomprehensible.* For, being infinite in His being, God unites all perfections in Himself and is infinitely greater than all that we can imagine or conceive. "Behold," says the Prophet Isaias, "the nations [compared with Him] are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance; behold, the islands are as a little dust. All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity" (Is. xl. 15, 17). Has He not called heaven and earth, with all their greatness and splendor and glory, out of their nothingness into existence with one word of His mouth? And does He not preserve all things in their existence and order by the mere power of His will? Was it not He who gathered the raging waters and confined them within their limits, saying: So far

shall you come and no farther, here shall your proud waves be stayed! Who is like unto God? Eternity is His age; and His name is "Who is." Heaven and earth are His kingdom; He is surrounded with light and glory inaccessible; He moves upon the wings of the winds!

And who art thou, O man? Consider thy body; to-day thou art, and to-morrow thou art withered like a flower. Consider thy soul; how limited in understanding, how weak and unstable in will! How corrupt is thy imagination, how unbridled thy passions! What art thou, O man, in comparison with God? What art thou even in comparison with all men who have been, who are, and who shall be to the end of the world? And what are all these in comparison with God, who created them all with one word of His mouth, and enlivened them with one breath of His spirit? All things before Him are as if they were not. Who, then, art thou, who hast rebelled against thy God?—What a foul revolt is, therefore, thy sin! Is it not a revolt of the lowest servant against the highest Lord, and, consequently, an infinite outrage offered to God?

b. Who is God, and who is man? God is the *Creator;* man is His *creature.* But the right which the Creator has to the obedience of the creature is the most sacred and absolute. And why so? Because it is the source of all right. In fact, if the owner has a right to his possessions; if lords have rights in regard to their subjects; if parents have rights in regard to their children; they possess such rights only as the representatives of God, to whom He has consigned some portion of His supreme right. All these rights, therefore, and whatever other rights exist, flow from the supreme dominion of God over His creatures. The right of God to the obedience and service of His

creatures is, consequently, the most sacred and absolute of all rights. But sin is a revolt against God. Sin is, therefore, not only the greatest outrage, but also the most crying injustice against God.

c. Who is God, and who is man? God is the supreme *benefactor;* man is the *object of His beneficence.* Whatever you are and whatever you possess is the mere bounty of God. It is to God you owe your body and soul, with all their wonderful powers and faculties. It is to God you owe your possessions, your family connections, your position in the world, and whatever else you prize in life. God is, therefore, the supreme benefactor of man. But sin is a rebellion against God. It is, therefore, an ingratitude towards God. And what an ingratitude! An ingratitude so vile, so shameful, that it has no equal, no parallel, amid the various species of ingratitude. It is not merely against his benefactor that the sinner rebels; it is against his greatest, his supreme benefactor: against his greatest benefactor, on account of the quality of the benefits He confers; against his supreme benefactor, because all the benefits he receives from men proceed ultimately from God. And it is precisely the benefits and favors which God confers on him that the sinner abuses against Him in the commission of sin. These are the arms of his revolt: the senses and limbs of his body, the faculties of his soul. And are these weapons not the gifts of God? And this ingratitude he commits just at the moment he is receiving God's favors; for while the sinner is offending God, while he is abusing God's gifts to offend the Giver, God is his preserver and by His continued act of creation supports his life, the limbs and senses of his body, and the faculties of his soul. Is there any other ingratitude, then, so foul as sin?

2. The malice of a revolt, however, is not fathomed merely by the relation between lord and subject, but also by *the design*, or intention of the rebellious party. Now, what is the aim which the sinner has in view?

a. His immediate object is the unlawful gratification of his passion, a pleasure which is forbidden by God, and which involves the loss of God and eternal happiness. The sinner is well aware of this baleful consequence of his sin. When, therefore, despite his better knowledge, he trangresses the commandment of God, he prefers this vile self-indulgence to the Supreme Good, and thus makes himself guilty of an inconceivable *contempt of God*. A passage from the history of the passion of the Lord may illustrate the enormity of this contempt. Pilate, who knew the innocence of Our Saviour, was eager, as you know, to free Him from the hands of the Jews. In order to pacify the Jews, he submitted Our Lord to the cruel torture of the scourging, and then led forth the Man of Sorrows, dripping with blood and disfigured with wounds, and showed Him to the people, saying: "Whom shall I release to you, Jesus or Barabbas?" But to his surprise a general shout was raised by the crowd: "Give us Barabbas! Away with Jesus! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" You are shocked, no doubt, at the conduct of the Jews. How! you will say, give preference to a public highwayman before the Son of God! What contempt of God! Your indignation is just; but does not the very same thing happen in the case of every grievous sin? Does not man stand in this alternative to choose between God and the creature in every grievous temptation? And if he yields to the temptation and violates God's commandment, does he not give preference to a vile creature before the Supreme Good? And what manner of creature is

it that the sinner prefers to God? Is it not commonly a miserable and momentary pleasure, often, at the same time, so loathsome and shameful that we dare not even mention it. Is this not the same as preferring Barabbas to the Son of God—the most profound contempt of God?

b. I go still further and say that this revolt against God has for its ultimate end the *annihilation* of God. Thus among others St. Thomas teaches, when he says in express terms that sin, that is, the rebellion against God, is the annihilation of God. And, in fact, we cannot deny that, as far as the sinner is concerned, he has this tendency towards the destruction of God. For what does the sinner do? He refuses God the obedience that is due to Him, and thus withdraws himself, as far as in him lies, from the supreme dominion of God. Does he not behave in such a manner as if God had no right to command him, as if he were his own master, and altogether independent of God? Does he not thus upset the order established by God? Does he not himself, as far as depends on him, usurp the place that by right belongs to God? Is not this an attempt, though vain, to depose God from His throne? The sinner knows very well that God abominates sin with relentless hatred, that He punishes it with the everlasting pains of hell, that it is "a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 31). Now, when, despite this knowledge, he commits sin, does he not wish in his heart that God did not exist? But what is that else, than, as far as will and desire are concerned, to do away with God, to annihilate God? "The fool [the sinner] said in his heart," says the Psalmist, "there is no God" (Ps. lii. 1).

The sinner knows very well that sin has consigned the Son of God to the most cruel and ignominious death of

the cross; he is one of those of whom it is said that they crucify again to themselves the Son of God, making Him a mockery (Heb. vi. 6). Is not, then, the sinner in a certain true sense a *deicide?* Is he not guilty of the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? The ordinary murderer finds no rest here on earth. The pangs of his conscience pursue him whithersoever he goes. Like Cain, he bears the mark of the murderer on his brow, wherever he may flee. O sinner, you are no ordinary murderer; you bear not the murder of a man, but the murder of a God on your conscience! And your conscience is at rest! And you remain for years in your sins! And you heap sin upon sin! Do you not see the blood of Jesus Christ, in which your hands are imbrued? Do you not see the curse of God's vengeance, that is hovering over you? Do you not see the destruction which sin brings upon you?—But to convince you further of the evil of sin, I shall proceed to show you its ruinous effects on the sinner himself.

II. THE GREATEST EVIL IN REGARD TO US.

Sin is not only an evil for us, but it is the greatest of all evils. It is a greater evil than the cruelest tyrant, than the most relentless persecutor. The tyrant can injure only the body; sin injures the soul; sin robs, tortures, and kills the soul.

1. Sin, by making man the enemy of God, *robs his soul* of all its supernatural goods. And first of all, it robs him of the *friendship of God.* O beloved brethren, what a treasure is the friendship of God! What a bliss it is to have so great, so powerful, so loyal a friend! If God is your friend, what are you not entitled to hope from Him? What have you then to fear? What can injure you as long as you have a friend to

protect you who is power and faithfulness itself? With such a friend at your side death itself has no terror for you. If God is with you, who is against you? If in your last moments all should abandon you, yet God will not forsake you. He resides in your heart and whispers words of encouragement and consolation to you. My child, He says, fear not; behold, I am with you! Oh, blessed is the man who, in the last terrible struggle, hears the consoling voice of his loving God and Father! What a terrible evil, then, to be deprived of this friendship of God! What a dreadful curse is sin, which robs us of this friendship!

But sin strips us also of the incomparable *beauty* which sanctifying grace sheds upon the soul. This beauty of the sanctified soul is supernatural; a beauty before whose lustre every other created beauty vanishes; a beauty which infinitely transcends all the beauty of the universe. Such is this beauty that the very angels of God are enraptured at its sight, and that God Himself contemplates it with infinite complacency. For sanctifying grace is the costly nuptial garment, which fits the soul to appear at the heavenly banquet, amid God's angels and saints, and before the very throne of the Most High Himself. Therefore St. Thomas calls it the radiance of the divine countenance, which makes the soul partaker of God's infinite beauty. And all this godlike beauty is lost by sin; nay, the soul is changed into the hideous image of the devil. For it was sin, only one sin, which changed Lucifer, the most beautiful of God's angels, into a foul and ghastly demon. What a terrible havoc, then, does sin play upon the soul!

Moreover, sin robs the soul of the *freedom* of the children of God, which Christ has purchased at the cost of His precious blood. For as soon as the soul is de-

prived of sanctifying grace it becomes the slave of Satan, who is the most hateful and cruel of all slaveholders. O what an incalculable loss! What a dreadful misfortune!

Finally, sin robs the soul of all its *merits* and of the right to eternal happiness. Such is the state of the soul that has forfeited the grace of God by mortal sin: a state of bereavement, of utter helplessness, of abject poverty and squalor.

2. The tyrant tortures the body; sin *tortures the soul.* Sin is the cause of that fretting remorse that gnaws upon the soul of the sinner. The sinner's heart is like a cave filled with poisonous serpents. During the night the light-fleeing brood lies twisted in endless coils, silent and harmless in their dark den; but as soon as the first ray of the rising sun strikes them, they begin to move and hasten in different directions, rearing their hideous heads, menacing and hissing at the passers-by. Thus a brood of serpents, the offspring of sin, sleep, silent and as if dead, in the darkened heart of the sinner. But as soon as the light begins to dawn in his heart, as soon as the rays of the sun of justice penetrate into the folds and dark recesses of his soul, the poisonous vermin begin to crawl within his breast. There is a hissing, and quivering, and worrying, and gnawing within him. O wretched sinner, exclaims St. Augustine, how piteous is thy state, when thy conscience thus tortures thee! But were it not much worse, he adds, if it were silent? Would not that be a sure sign that God had abandoned thee?

3. The tyrant kills the body; sin *kills the soul.* It deprives the soul of its supernatural life; for the supernatural life of the soul consists in sanctifying grace, which is destroyed by sin. And, in fact, sin renders the soul like a dead body. A dead body neither sees,

nor hears, nor feels. It becomes an object of disgust, and if not soon removed it diffuses offensive odors, and even the germs of contagion. Is not this a true image of your state, O sinner? Are you not blind? Or do you see the grave gaping open at your feet? Do you see the awful judgment-seat of God, before which you are soon to stand? Do you see hell yawn open to receive you? Are you not deaf? Or do you hear the voice of conscience, the voice of reason, the voice of faith, the voice of the Church, the voice of your parents? Are you not bereft of feeling? Or are you sensible of the graces and favors which God has lavished upon you? Are you not also an object of disgust and abomination to God, to your holy angel, and even to yourself? And do you, too, not diffuse the evil odor of bad example, and spread the deadly contagion of scandal among your fellow-men? Though you seem to live, then, you are spiritually dead.

Sin is, therefore, the greatest of all evils, both in its relation to God and to ourselves. It is the one great evil which we have to dread in this life; a dreadful monster, that not only devours the body but blights the soul with its poisonous breath. And yet, how many sins have you been guilty of, my dear friend—in childhood, in youth, in maturer age; sins of thought, of word, of action? Who can count them? Is that the gratitude you owe to God, who has created you for eternal happiness; who has preserved you; who has redeemed you? Is that the gratitude you owe to the Son of God, who became man for your sake, and died for you on the cross? Oh, then, humbly acknowledge your errors and transgressions; come to the feet of your crucified Lord, and having bewailed your sins from your heart, make a sincere and contrite confession. And you, my dear friends, who possess the grace of

God, renew your firm resolution rather to die than again to bring this dreadful evil upon yourselves; thus we shall all once be united in the glory of heaven. Amen.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

AVARICE.

"Covetousness is the root of all evils."—I. Tim. vi. 10.

This bodily disease of the dropsy, which our blessed Lord is represented to us in the gospel of to-day as miraculously curing, has a marked resemblance to a disease of the soul, which is by no means of rare occurrence among Christians of our day—the spiritual disease of *avarice*. For, as the dropsy causes an insatiable thirst for water, and is very difficult to cure, so the vice of avarice is characterized by an unquenchable greed for the goods of this world, and is, at the same time, very difficult to be removed. This circumstance suggested to me that I should take the vice of avarice for my subject to-day. And I followed the suggestion the more readily, because I am well aware that, considering the strong tendency to enrich ourselves, which is inborn in the hearts of us all, and the evil examples which surround us, we run great risk to allow ourselves to be carried away by this vice. Therefore I have chosen for my text the words of the Apostle: "Covetousness is the root of all evils;" for it contains all those motives which are fitted to deter us from this hateful vice. According to these words avarice is the root of evil and a very prolific root, since it produces not a certain class, or a certain number of evils, but all evils. The vice of avarice is, therefore, not one of an ordinary character, but one whose root lies deeply concealed in our depraved nature; one that is specially productive of evil fruits; and one that is, moreover, hard to extract from the human heart. These attributes, however,

are peculiar only to avarice in the strictest sense, that is, the immoderate desire of worldly riches, whereby one places his whole happiness in the possession of earthly goods, and thereby endangers his eternal salvation. For, a moderate concern for our sustenance is not a sin, but is lawful and even a duty which is, to some extent, incumbent on all.

Thus understood, therefore, I say that avarice is a vice which is—

1. *Deeply hidden in the human heart;*
2. *Very productive of evil fruits;*
3. *Very difficult to root out.*

I. DEEPLY HIDDEN IN THE HUMAN HEART.

Though avarice is wont to manifest itself partly by acts of injustice, partly by immoderate attachment to property justly acquired, yet I do not hesitate to say that it is one of its characteristics to be deeply concealed in the human breast. It is such a vile and contemptible vice that people are ashamed of it, and carefully endeavor to conceal it both from their neighbors and from themselves. And, in fact, although there are very many affected with this vice, as may easily be seen from the number of frauds and dishonesties daily committed, yet you will rarely find one who will frankly acknowledge that he is influenced by this passion. Men who are given to other vices easily own their faults, and do not hesitate, at times, either publicly or privately, to acknowledge them; but the slave of avarice employs all means to extenuate and to *cloak his weakness.* If he is hard-hearted towards the poor and indigent, and refuses to contribute to their relief, it is because he is unwilling to encourage idleness and mendicancy. If he turns out upon the street a poor family, who are unable to pay their rent, it is only be-

cause he has a higher duty to provide for his own family.

Nay, he is able to *find excuses for manifest injustice.* If, for instance, he happens, by mistake in business, or on change, to receive a considerable sum over what is due to him, he pockets it without misgiving, and says to himself: the same party has surely had the advantage of me some other time. If he withholds the stipulated pay from his laborers, or if he contracts debts, which he foresees with great probability that he can never pay, it is want that compels him to do so. The debts which are long since due, and which he is well able to pay, he defers from year to year, because, as he says, his business would otherwise suffer. If he embarks on speculations which are far beyond his means, and thus runs the imminent risk of bringing himself and others into utter ruin, he justifies himself with the prevalent custom, and the truism that he who never ventures never wins. Adulteration of goods, false weights and measures, exorbitant prices, when such are practicable—all this is necessary to make both ends meet, and is nothing extraordinary with smart business men. If he is a lawyer he is not only ready to take up any case, be it ever so unjust, but also to defend it to the last, and to draw it out indefinitely; else, how could he make his living? And so in the other lines of business and society.

In short, the avaricious man seeks, by all manner of devices, to conceal his sordid greed of gain. He is stricken with *blindness*, so that, in many cases, nothing short of a miracle can open his eyes. Such a miracle St. Francis of Paula is said once to have worked before Louis XI., king of France. The saint, it is said, once remonstrated with the king on the money that was unjustly extorted from his subjects by certain grasping officials. "Do you not see, Sire," said the saint, "that

that money is dripping with the blood of your subjects?" The king turned a deaf ear to his words. Hereupon the saint took up a handful of the money that lay before him, and drops of blood began to trickle from the coin. This miracle opened the king's eyes to the extortions that were practised on his subjects. If such a wonder-worker were to take and press the money of certain business men, and liquor-dealers, and lawyers, and officials of our days; if he were to test the silver plate and gold ornaments of certain high-lived families; if he were to examine the jewelry of certain fashionable ladies; what a profusion of blood would flow!—The blood of widows and orphans! The blood of the poor laborers! The blood of the ignorant and unwary! How many, who are now blind to their own dishonesty and injustice, would then see how deeply the vice of avarice is rooted in their hearts, and what havoc it has worked upon their own souls and upon the goods of their unsuspecting neighbor! You see, then, beloved brethren, that the root of avarice lies deeply concealed in the human heart. But what makes this vice still more hateful are the pernicious fruits which it bears.

II. PRODUCTIVE OF EVIL FRUITS.

The evil fruits produced by this deeply rooted vice may be reduced to two heads: the sins into which it draws its victim, and the misery into which it thrusts him.

1. As for the *sins* that are begotten of this vice, they are numerous and grievous. This vice, as we have seen, is the root of all evil; it leads to the transgression of *all God's commandments*. The first commandment forbids idolatry; this vice leads to idolatry. Its god is wealth; in this idol the victim of avarice puts his whole confidence; this idol he serves; to this idol he

sacrifices what is nearest and dearest to him, his soul and his eternal salvation. Therefore St. Paul (Eph. v. 5) expressly calls this vice the worship of idols. The second commandment forbids perjury. Now, it is well known that in most cases of perjury avarice is at the bottom. One need only read the reports of public trials for perjury to be convinced of this fact. The third commandment forbids the profanation of the Lord's day. But what is the cause why the Sunday is profaned by servile works, either done by one's self, or caused to be done by others? Is it not, in most cases, the greed of gain? And is this not the cause, too, that the obligation of hearing Mass on Sundays and holy-days is disregarded, or that Mass is heard amid a thousand distracting thoughts? This vice is, moreover, the cause why the fourth commandment is often violated. Are there not many ungrateful children, who, forgetful of the love they owe to their parents, anxiously await their death, that they may the sooner come to their inheritance? And are there not, on the other hand, parents who neglect to give their children the necessary education, because they shrink from the expenses? Are there not parents who, for love of gain, force their children to a state or profession to which they are neither called nor inclined? Are there not fathers and mothers who, when there is question of settling their children for life, make money the sole object of consideration? Are not all these facts of so common occurrence flagrant violations of the fourth commandment of God? And are they not, at the same time, the evil fruits of avarice? Nor is this vice less prolific of sins against the fifth commandment. How many enmities does it produce between friends and relatives! What hatred, envy, jealousy, and revenge between rival business men! Yea, how many murders

have sprung from this unhallowed source! And as to the sixth commandment, everybody knows that there are men and women who make an industry of the vice of impurity, and use all means to bring numberless persons to a life of sin and misery. And, finally, the violation of the seventh and eighth commandments is the peculiar province of avarice. Theft, and fraud, and swindle, and cheating, and lying, and detraction, and calumny, and whatever other sins there are against these commandments, are the ordinary expedients of the avaricious.

2. But the vice of avarice not only leads its victims into numberless and grievous sins, but it also makes them completely *unhappy*. The avaricious man lives in continual anxiety. The fear of losing what he possesses, and the insatiable desire to add to his gain, deprive him of all peace, and torture him incessantly. If a misfortune befalls him, as often happens, he is inconsolable. He finds comfort neither with God nor with man. Those who know him rather laugh at his misfortune than pity him; for no one has compassion with the miser or the avaricious man. The thought of Divine Providence, which is so consoling in adversity, is a stranger to him. Nay, it is as if for the avaricious man there were no Providence, and as if the words of Our Lord had no reference to him, when He says: "Be not solicitous, therefore, saying: What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 31–33). Instead of this peaceful resignation, the curse of God rests upon the avaricious; for accursed, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture, is the man who con-

fides in his riches. Accursed was the covetous Achan (Jos. vii.); accursed was the wicked Jezabel (III. Kings xxi.); accursed was Giezi (IV. Kings v.); accursed was Judas, the traitor (Acts i. 18). The avaricious man is accursed in life; nothing will succeed to his mind; his ill-gotten gain brings a curse on what he possesses honestly. He is accursed in death. Oh, how hard it is for him to separate himself in death from what he so loved in life! He is accursed in eternity, when, as St. James says (v. 3), the rust will consume his riches as the fire shall feed upon his flesh. Avarice is, therefore, not only deeply rooted in the human heart, but also most prolific of evil fruits, truly the root of all evils. It is, moreover—

III. HARD TO ROOT OUT.

Avarice, as I have said, is an immoderate desire of riches, whereby one seeks his happiness in them. The avaricious man is, therefore, attached to riches as to his happiness itself, with an extraordinary and almost invincible attachment. Hence we may see how hard it is for him to extract this evil root from his heart. He has to detach his heart from those things to which it clings so tenaciously—not only from what he has unjustly acquired, but also from what he justly possesses. And that is certainly no easy matter.

1. The avaricious man must divest his heart of the attachment to *what he unjustly possesses;* in other words, he must make restitution of all ill-gotten gain. Until he does this there can be no question of extracting the root of all evils from his heart. And if he is unable to make restitution, because means are wanting to him, he must, at least, have the will and intention to do so as soon as he is able. And he who is able to make restitution must restore all, or, at least, what he can,

and that without delay. But this is evidently no easy matter, especially for him who thus far clung with his whole heart and soul to the goods of this world.

2. The slave of avarice must also renounce all sinful attachment to *what he justly possesses.* He is bound, therefore, if he possesses abundance of the goods of this world, to give alms to the poor and contribute, according to his means, to charitable purposes. For, if charity is a duty for all indiscriminately who possess sufficient means, it is doubly so for the avaricious man; for he is bound not only by the love he owes to his neighbor, but also by the love he owes to himself, by the duty he owes to his eternal salvation. But how hard this obligation appears to him may be concluded from the excuses which such men are accustomed to make.

Avarice has, therefore, all the attributes of a most pernicious root of sin. It is deeply fastened in the heart; it is most luxurious in its growth of baneful fruits; it can only with the greatest difficulty be uprooted. It is therefore one of the most ruinous and detestable of vices—that very vice which led to the betrayal of the Son of God. Not without good reason, then, does the Apostle say: "They that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition" (I. Tim. vi. 9).

Let us, then, beloved brethren, seriously examine ourselves and see whether our conscience reproaches us with this vice. Oh, flee this passion for riches, which is so vile, so degrading, so pernicious. Seek, therefore, first the kingdom of God and His justice. Then you may look forward with a joyous assurance to eternal bliss, which alone can satiate the cravings of the human heart. Amen.

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind."—Matt. xxii. 37.

OUR blessed Lord calls the commandment of the love of God the greatest and first commandment, because in this one all the others are contained, and this one is consequently the chief of all. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that all of us should know how we stand in regard to this commandment, in which consists the fulfilment of the whole law; and this is of the greater moment, since it may very easily happen that we deceive ourselves in this matter. For how often does it occur that certain pious feelings and praiseworthy actions are taken erroneously for effects of the love of God, while they are nothing more than the outgrowth of mere natural impulse and self-love!

In order to secure you, therefore, as far as possible from self-illusion in this point, I shall to-day put before you the *characteristic marks of the genuine love of God*. These marks, or attributes, are chiefly three, which will form the division of my subject. The true love of God—

1. *Renders child-like obedience to God;*
2. *Gives God the preference over every other thing;*
3. *Cherishes for God an inward affection.*

I. RENDERS GOD CHILD-LIKE OBEDIENCE.

The first attribute of the love of God is child-like obedience; for God, as our Creator and the Creator

of heaven and earth, from whom all authority emanates, is our sovereign Lord and Master. The love which we owe to God, therefore, demands of us that we love Him as our supreme Ruler and King: "Thou shalt love the *Lord*." This we can do only by loving Him as faithful subjects love their sovereign, i. e., by loving to be His subjects. And how do we prove this submissive love? Manifestly by submitting ourselves willingly to His laws and commands, by serving Him not as slaves, but as children; not with servile, but with child-like obedience. Child-like obedience is, consequently, the first attribute of the love of God.

1. The love of God, therefore, demands, first of all, that we *observe the law and the entire law of God.* He who transgresses even one commandment does not love God. This Our Saviour teaches expressly in His answer to the question who it was that loved Him: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John xiv. 21). If we would know, then, how we stand in regard to the love of God, we must see whether we keep all the commandments without exception; for, if we break even one, the love of God is not in us.

You are the *head of a family*, who is commonly considered a good Christian; you attend regularly at the services of the Church; you are not given to drink; you are industrious and honest in business; you are generous towards the poor, and live on good terms with all your neighbors. However, it may be that you neglect the education of your children. My dear friend, despite your many excellent qualities, the love of God is not in you, because you fail to fulfil the fourth commandment, which obliges you to provide for the education of your children. Or let us suppose *a married woman.* She devotes considerable time to

prayer; she attends all the devotions and services of the Church; she frequents the sacraments. But to the great disgust of her husband, she is little concerned for his comfort, and generally neglects her household duties. Notwithstanding her apparent piety, the love of God is not in her. Why? Because she neglects her duty towards her husband and the duties of her state in grave matters, and thus grievously violates the fourth commandment of God. And so it is also with the children. There is *a son*, for instance, who is chaste, industrious, temperate—in short, to all appearances, an exemplary young man. But, instead of giving his earnings to his parents, who provide for all his wants, and have incurred so much expense for him, he retains all or a great part for himself. Another keeps late hours, and goes his own ways, although his parents have often forbidden him to do so, and although he knows his conduct sorely grieves them. Such sons have not the love of God; the one, because he violates the seventh commandment, which says: "Thou shalt not steal;" the other, because he disregards the fourth commandment, which says: "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother." And *the daughter*, who, without the knowledge and consent of her parents, or against their will, carries on correspondence and keeps up connections with young men, however pious and well-behaved she may otherwise be, has not the love of God, because she, too, violates the fourth commandment, to say nothing of the fact that she exposes herself to temporal and eternal ruin. The love of God requires, therefore, in the first place, that we keep the commandments of God.

2. This, however, is not enough; we must also endeavor to obey God with a *child-like heart*, and not in servile fear. For it is not slavish obedience, but child-

like submission that gives evidence of true love. But, if this is the case, how many are there not, even among Christians, whose love, to say the least, is very doubtful! Are there not many lukewarm Christians, whose highest aim it is to avoid mortal sin, but who make no account of venial sins; who, so to say, drink in venial sins like water? Are these Christians influenced by the love of God? Is it not the sheer dread of eternal punishment that checks them from grievous sins? Is not, therefore, their love at least very doubtful? And this is particularly true of a certain class. There are many, especially amongst the young of both sexes, who, when taken to task on their neglect of prayer and of those services of the Church which are not strictly of obligation, or exhorted to frequent the sacraments, or admonished of their rather loose behavior and conversation and their immoderate love of amusement, answer, or at least think within themselves: well, all that is not so bad, after all; it is no grievous sin; and one does not always feel like praying; and there is no harm in a little fun; and we must have some amusement. The love which such people bear to God is, to say the very least, of a doubtful character.

Child-like obedience is, therefore, the first and most essential attribute of true love of God, and this child-like obedience is then forthcoming when we avoid not only grave transgressions of God's commandments, but also, as far as possible, the minor offences which should be foreign to a true child of God.

II. GIVES GOD THE PREFERENCE BEFORE ALL THINGS.

The second characteristic of the love of God is that we give God the preference over everything else, in other words, that we are resolved, with the assistance of God's grace, to allow ourselves under no consider-

ation to be swayed from the love of God. *The Apostle* expressly requires this disposition in him who loves God; for, after summing up all manner of dangers and sufferings, in his Epistle to the Romans, he says: I am sure that all this shall not be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, Our Lord (Rom. viii. 35-39). Now, since the Apostle does not here speak of himself alone, but writes these words for all nations, it is evident that they are meant for all Christians without exception. He manifestly requires, then, that the love of God in us should be such that nothing can separate us from it, that is, that we love God above all things:. "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Ibid.)

The same is the teaching of *reason*. For, since the good is the object of love, reason demands that we love a thing more or less according to its degree of goodness. But God is the highest and most perfect good; consequently reason requires that we love Him above all things, that is, that we give Him the preference before everything else. If we prefer anything else to Almighty God, we evidently are guilty of an outrage against Him, and consequently we love Him not. Therefore our blessed Lord says: "He that loveth father or mother [and still more who loveth something less deserving of love] more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (Matt. x. 37).

But it must be borne in mind that, when we say: we should love God above all things, this is to be understood of the *disposition of the will, not of the intensity of feeling*. God does not demand of us any particular tenderness of sentiment or any special intensity of love, because our feelings are not altogether in our power. It is, therefore, not necessary that our love towards God should be tender or intense, as is the love of a

child towards his mother, or of a mother towards her child; but it is sufficient that we prefer God to all other things, and are resolved to suffer all things rather than renounce the love of God.

Now, let us ask ourselves seriously *whether our love is really such?* I shall try to facilitate for you the answer to this question, by a few examples. The father of a numerous family happens to be in the possession of ill-gotten property. But as he loves his children tenderly, and is most anxious to see them well provided for, he finds it extremely difficult to make restitution of what he unjustly possesses. Now, if he cannot induce himself to fulfil the obligation of justice and divest himself of his unjust gain, he loves his children more than God, and does not possess the love of God. A young woman is keeping dangerous company, which engrosses her whole heart and soul. She is told to give it up. She says, or at least thinks in her heart, she cannot. What does the love of God require of her? Evidently, that she break off the connection, however great the sacrifice may seem to her. She refuses to do so; she loves a creature more than God; the love of God is not hers. A rich man, whose whole heart is set upon his riches, could give large alms without any inconvenience. But as often as he is asked to give an alms, or to contribute to any charitable purpose, it is as if he were asked to part with life itself. Now, what must he do that he may be able to say from his heart: O God, I love Thee above all things? Naturally, he must overcome his immoderate attachment to his riches and give a reasonable share of his abundance in charity. Why? Because otherwise he loves his money more than he loves God, and consequently the love of God is not in him.

These examples may suffice to show you whether

you love God above all things; for, as in the cases I have put before you so it is in all other cases, whether there is question of persons or objects to which the heart is immoderately attached. You may easily find out, then, whether your heart so immoderately clings to any earthly creature that you are disposed rather to lose the love of God than to abandon it. If such is the case, the love of God is not in you.

III. HAS AN INWARD AFFECTION TO GOD.

True love is always combined with an inward affection to the person or object that is loved. Or, can you imagine true love without affection? Inward affection, therefore, must be a characteristic of the love of God. Now, we must ask ourselves, also, whether we possess this attribute of the love of God. But, in order to be able to answer this question, you must know that the affection of which we speak is a rational, not a sensitive one; that it consists not in tenderness of sentiment, but in the disposition of the will; and that it may very well exist without any intensity of feeling, or even contrary to feeling. But what does it consist in practically? It consists in this, that we make God the object of our thoughts, of our zeal, and of our longings.

1. Love, therefore, requires that we make God the *object of our thoughts*, i. e., that we love to think of God. Would you believe in the love of a child, or a friend, who would never think, or care to think, of his parent or friend? But let us ask ourselves how we stand in this regard towards God? Do we love to think of God? Do we think of Him at least when duty requires of us to do so? If you do not even then think of God, beloved brethren; if you wilfully abandon yourselves to all manner of distracting thoughts at your daily prayers and at the holy sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays,

or perhaps neglect prayer and the hearing of Mass altogether ; if you are not at all concerned to have a good intention in your daily occupations, but your whole attention is directed to temporal gain, how can you possess the love of God? Where, then, is the affection peculiar to the love of God?

2. Love requires that we make God the *object of our zeal*, that is, that we are earnestly concerned to promote the honor of God. One is naturally concerned for the honor of him whom one really loves. Therefore, he who is indifferent with regard to the honor of God has no affection and can have no love for God. Now, you are not called upon to be apostles to the whole world, like St. Paul ; but are you not called, and have you not the strict duty and every facility, to be apostles to your own children and to your own household? Are you not bound to maintain good order and promote piety and Christian virtue in your own families? Can you not be apostles, and are you not called to be such, for your own immediate surroundings? Are you not bound, as far as may be, to keep your neighbor from evil, and to incite him to good, at least, by your good example? But if you neglect all those opportunities of promoting the honor of God, if you show no zeal for His glory, how can the love of God be in you? Where is your affection for God?

3. Finally, love requires that we make God the *object of our longings*, that is, that our greatest desire is to possess Him, to be united with Him ; for it is peculiar to love to excite the longing to possess the object of our affection. Where there is no desire, no longing, there is no affection, no love. Look, then, my dear friend, whether your desire of riches, honors, pleasures, amusements, and sensual gratifications be not greater than your longing for the possession of God. If

such is the case, the love of God is not in you.

Beloved brethren, if by these marks you find out that in all probability you possess the love of God, give thanks to Him, from the bottom of your hearts; for the love of God is a treasure that is of more value than the whole world and all that it can bestow; a treasure that entitles us to the possession of God, the source of all good, the fountain of eternal happiness. Be careful also to guard this inestimable treasure, and therefore beware of sin. But should there be some amongst you who, from what I have said, have made the sad discovery that they have thus far deceived themselves, imagining they possessed the love of God, while they lacked its chief attributes, them I would entreat, first of all not to be discouraged, but rather to give thanks to Almighty God for the light He has given them, and to make use of this grace to regain the love of God by a good confession, and to preserve it in all future by earnestly availing themselves of the means of grace. Thus let us hope that death will find us all in the possession of the love of God, and will be the gate that will lead us to that everlasting love, which will gratify every longing of our hearts forever. Amen.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

VENIAL SIN.

"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."—Matt. ix. 2.

From these words of Our Lord it may be concluded that the paralytic of whom the Gospel hear speaks was more anxious on account of his sins than on account of his malady, and that he was more solicitous to obtain the health of the soul than that of the body. This penitent disposition so pleased Our Saviour, that He not only forgave him his sins, but also relieved him of his bodily infirmity. This, beloved brethren, should be the disposition of all good Christians, not only in regard to mortal sin, but also in regard to venial sin, for without true repentance not even venial sin can be forgiven. Now, with regard to mortal sins, the absolute necessity for salvation urges us to true penance for them, and to a firm resolution never more to commit them. But how do we stand in regard to contrition for our venial sins? Do we detest them from our hearts, and are we always firmly resolved to avoid them in future? There are doubtless many amongst you who are thus disposed; but are there not also many who make very little account of venial sins, who drink them in, as a matter of course, like the very air they breathe? In order, therefore, to strengthen the former class, and, if possible, to correct the recklessness of the latter, I shall to-day take *venial sin* for my subject, and endeavor briefly to show you how detestable it is, and, consequently, with what care it is to be avoided. I say, therefore, that venial

sin, however lightly people may think of it, is a *great evil*, both (1) *in reference to God* and, (2) *in reference to ourselves*: in reference to God, because it is an offence committed against Him; in reference to us, because it is most injurious to our souls.

I. AN EVIL IN REFERENCE TO GOD.

Venial sin, as I have said, is an offence against God. I do not here speak of those daily faults which are committed through human frailty, levity, and want of reflection, and which not even the just and God-fearing can wholly avoid without a special and extraordinary grace; I speak of those venial sins which are committed *knowingly and deliberately*, and which with moderate care and the ordinary grace of God can easily be avoided. Such are, for example, wilful distractions in prayer, laughing and talking in church, disobedience in small matters, slight quarrels, slightly abusive and uncharitable words, slightly envious feelings, sensual, though not unchaste affections, vanity, lying, petty thefts, and the like. Such venial sins, I say, are a great evil in reference to God.

1. *What do we understand by a venial sin?* It is a transgression of a commandment of God in a slight matter. He who steals a few pence, for instance, or some other object of little value, makes himself guilty of a venial sin, not of a grievous sin, because he violates the seventh commandment in a small matter. The same holds of the other commandments, the sixth commandment alone excepted; for every completely wilful and direct violation of this commandment, whether in thought or action, is a grievous sin. It is only a venial sin, however, to transgress a commandment of God even in a grievous matter, when the transgression is not fully wilful. Thus sins against the sixth commandment may

be only venial sins, when committed without full deliberation or consent. In any case, however, you see that venial sin is a wilful violation of God's commandment. It is, consequently, a disobedience to God, and a violation of the reverence due to Him. Hence every venial sin is an *offence against God.*

2. An offence against Almighty God, be it ever so small, is always a *great evil.* For the gravity of an offence does not depend alone upon the nature of the transgression, but also upon the dignity and character of him against whom it is committed. An unfriendly or impolite word, which gives little offence to a servant, may be very offensive to a person of high position. A cold and reserved behavior is easily overlooked by a stranger, but may be very keenly felt by a benefactor or an intimate friend. Hence we see how offensive even the slightest transgressions must be to Almighty God, whose majesty is infinite, whose favors are without number, and whose love is so tender that He has given His only-begotten Son for us unto the death of the cross. But if every transgression, no matter how small it may be, is so offensive to Almighty God, it follows evidently that even the slightest venial sins are a great evil in reference to Him.

3. Nay, venial sin is *next to mortal sin the greatest* of all evils—greater than all other evils taken together, greater even than the pains of purgatory or hell. For all these evils are punishments, while sin is guilt; and guilt, according to St. Thomas of Aquin, is a greater evil than punishment. For God, who is the author of the greatest punishments, cannot be the author of even the least guilt. Besides, all other evils are evils to men; but sin is an evil against God Himself, the only evil which has this peculiarity of being, as far as can be, an evil to God. Therefore sin, be it ever so light, so far surpasses all

other evils, as God transcends all creatures. If, therefore, by one simple lie, which is only a venial sin, you could avert war, pestilence, famine, conflagration, and all calamities which may befall man in this life, even then it would not be lawful to tell a lie—not even if by telling a lie you could free all the souls in purgatory and extinguish the flames of hell forever. Such is the teaching of the holy Fathers and divines of the Church. Hence it follows that it is better that the whole world should perish, and that the reprobate should be eternally tortured in hell, than that God should be offended even by the slightest venial sin; for all these evils, as I have said, are evils to men, but sin is, in a certain true sense, an evil to God. And as it is a slighter evil to kill a fly than that a man should be molested by it, so it is a lesser evil that the whole world should perish, and that the damned should be forever tortured by the flames of hell, than that God should be offended and, as it were, molested even by the slightest sin. What, then, should be our horror and detestation of every, even the least, venial sin! Should we not rather undergo every inconvenience—want, and misery, and even death itself, than commit a deliberate venial sin?

4. But, despite those terrible truths, some people will try to excuse themselves and say: Well, *the matter in question is so trifling*, so insignificant, and of so common occurrence—a little vanity, or a slight pleasure at the misfortune of another, a little impatience, or a harmless lie in excuse or to create a laugh. Very true; the matter may be trifling; but, notwithstanding its insignificance, it remains a venial sin, an offence against God, and, therefore, a great evil. Nay, on account of its insignificance the sin is in a certain sense more injurious to the divine majesty. For if it were a matter of great moment, if our fortune, our reputation,

or our life were at stake, though, even in that case, we would not be free from guilt, yet we might claim some compassion and mercy. But we can claim no indulgence where there is question of a slight self-denial, or trifling inconvenience. Is it not malicious on our part, and injurious to the honor of God, that we do not hesitate to offend God for such trifling reasons? Almighty God lays particular stress upon this circumstance when He says of the false prophets: "They violated Me among My people for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread" (Ezech. xiii. 19). Does not the same reproach fall upon us? Do we not daily offend God for less than a handful of barley and a piece of bread—for the sake of trifles of no account? And we make this an excuse to offend Almighty God! No, beloved brethren, this circumstance does not excuse, but accuses us, because it shows our disregard for the divine majesty, and is a mark of an ungrateful and ungenerous heart.

Yet there are some who are never short of an excuse. If you ask much of them, if you say they should live according to the spirit of the Gospel; that they should love poverty, contempt, and suffering for Christ's sake, and despise riches, honors, and pleasures, they put forward the plea of their innate weakness. If you ask but a little, some trifling self-denial, they plead that it is insignificant and not worth the trouble. That means that they are willing to do neither much nor little, that is, *nothing at all* for Almighty God. And with such a disposition they wish to obtain their eternal salvation!

5. What makes venial sins particularly displeasing to Almighty God is *the manner* in which they are committed. For they are committed wilfully, without misgiving, frequently, and despite the numberless favors which God daily lavishes upon us.

They are committed *wilfully*. I know that there are offences which are committed from human frailty, from forgetfulness and want of reflection; faults which surprise us before we are fully conscious of them. These are rather imperfections than sins. But how many are there, on the other hand, which are committed with perfect deliberation! How many against which our conscience has warned us, of which we have more than once accused ourselves in confession, and into which we have fallen again and again! But do not such sins manifest a reckless indifference towards Almighty God and His service?

They are committed *without misgiving*—without remorse, without repugnance, without a struggle. Are there not many who make a pastime, an amusement, a real game of venial sin? Nay, there are even such as go so far as to glory in it. Are there not Christians who consider it an honor to be less conscientious and freer in speech and behavior than other people? Are there not children who delight to consider themselves perfect little men and women, because they have learned to disregard, to disobey, and to deceive their parents in little matters? Are there not women who make a boast of having their own way, regardless of their husbands' wishes; and men who with great self-complacency relate to their neighbors how they manage to tyrannize their wives at home? And do you think that such behavior is not highly displeasing to God? Is it, then, a matter of no account, or even an object of pride?

They are committed *frequently*. Number, if you can, the venial sins you have committed in your past life, in thought, word, and deed; how often you have been neglectful at prayer and divine services; how often you have been disobedient and irreverent to your parents; how often uncharitable to your neighbor; how

many untruths and petty thefts you have been guilty of! Must you not in truth say with the Psalmist: "My iniquities are multiplied above the hairs of my head"? (Ps. xxxix. 13.) Yea, beloved brethren, if we descend into the depth of our heart and examine ourselves, we shall find it to be an abyss, a mighty ocean, teeming with all manner of creeping animals, that is, with numberless venial sins. "So is this great sea, which stretcheth wide its arms; there are creeping things without number, creatures little and great" (Ps. ciii. 25).

But the most aggravating circumstance of venial sin is the fact that it is thus deliberately, unscrupulously, and frequently committed, *despite the numberless favors* which God is daily bestowing upon us. For thus we show a base ingratitude to Almighty God, which must needs be highly displeasing to Him. Whence comes it that we are much more on our guard against mortal sins than against deliberate venial sins? Why do we take so much care to avoid the former, while we have not the least misgiving daily to commit the latter? Is it not, commonly, because we are governed by servile fear, not by love and gratitude to God? We flee mortal sin because we fear hell; but we are not afraid to commit venial sins, because they are not visited with eternal punishment. But does this behavior not show clearly that love and thankfulness have little power with us, and that servile fear is the main-spring of our actions? And is this the disposition which God has a right to expect from His beloved children? Should we not blush for shame when we reflect upon the favors of God—how He has chosen us, and called us into existence, in preference to millions who would have served Him more faithfully than we; how in His sweet Providence He has given us good and God-fearing parents, who have bestowed all care on our educa-

tion; how He has called us to the bosom of His true Church and made us partakers of all her numberless blessings! Beloved brethren, if we compare the number of sins which we daily commit with the countless benefits which we daily receive from Almighty God, we have every reason to blush for shame and to acknowledge that our behavior must needs be displeasing to Almighty God. Venial sin is, therefore, a great evil in reference to God, being an offence against His divine majesty and goodness. But it is comparatively no less—

II. AN EVIL IN REFERENCE TO US.

Venial sin proves most pernicious to us, in the first place, because it easily leads to mortal sin, and, secondly, because it brings upon us most grievous punishments.

1. It easily *leads to mortal sin.* This is not to be so understood as if any number of venial sins could amount to a mortal sin. This is impossible, as mortal sin is an altogether different species of sin, which totally severs our friendship with God and makes us deserving of eternal hatred and punishment. When I say, therefore, that venial sin easily leads to mortal sin, I mean that from venial to mortal sin the passage is easy; and the reasons of this facility are the following:

a. Venial sin *weakens the life of the soul*, and thus makes it more liable to spiritual death, that is, to mortal sin. The life of the soul consists in sanctifying grace and the love of God, which by venial sin are weakened in their action and in their effects. For venial sin is an immoderate attachment to some created object; and every immoderate attachment of this kind is a bond that fetters the free action of the soul and clogs its movement towards God, and subtracts from the

love that is due to God and bestows it upon His creatures. Hence it impedes the action of grace and endangers the life of the soul.

b. Venial sin *prevents God from bestowing His graces* upon us. It is a fact, confirmed by experience, that God, wearied, so to say, by the great number of venial offences, becomes more sparing in the dispensation of His graces to those who make little account of venial sins. He ceases to give them those *spiritual consolations*, which He so plentifully bestowed upon them in the days of their fervor, and which rendered them so happy and so zealous in His service. The practices of piety, which were formerly their delight, become irksome to them. Satiety and heaviness take the place of their previous spiritual joy. If they seek God in prayer, they find Him not. It is as if an impenetrable wall separated them from God, or as if no God existed for them. Now, there is nothing more natural than that the soul, which has thus deprived itself of spiritual consolation, should be tempted to abandon the exercises of piety and seek compensation in worldly and sensual pleasures; and, if it has once come to this pass, mortal sin is at the door.

And the fall of such a soul is the more easy, because God also withdraws from her that *supernatural light* of grace, which He formerly shed upon her in such profusion. Darkness hovers over such a soul. The unwonted gloom which surrounds her begets alarm and confusion. Then follow serious doubts of conscience, whether she has or has not yielded to temptation and offended God grievously. Life becomes an intolerable torture. Besides, such a soul is *bereft of the special protection of God* in dangers. Dangerous and grievous temptations assault her. The occasion presents itself with all its alluring attractions. Will such a soul

stand? Beloved brethren, it would be more than a miracle if a soul, thus weakened, and forsaken by God, did not yield to the temptation and fall into grievous sin.

c. A third reason why venial sin easily leads to mortal sin is that it *strengthens the passions*, and thus gradually prepares the way for mortal sin. Our passions are like wild animals. As these are in the beginning small and harmless, but gradually increase in strength and ferocity by the nourishment which they receive, so our passions are at the outset gentle and innocent, but by the food that is given them they gradually wax strong and violent, so that they can hardly be tamed, and forcibly drag their victims into the most enormous crimes. Was that not the case with all those of whom we read in Holy Scripture, who fell from the most exalted virtue into the abyss of vice? Take, for example, Judas, the traitor. Would he have betrayed Our Lord, if he had not by petty thefts fed the passion of avarice within his heart, until it became an invincible monster? Has that not been the case with yourselves, my dear friends? Have not many venial sins, many slight instances of unfaithfulness to God, preceded your fall into grievous sins? "No one," says St. Bernard, "becomes wicked all at once. Those who fall into grievous sins begin with little sins." And our blessed Lord Himself says: "He that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater" (Luke xvi. 10).

Venial sin, therefore, easily leads to mortal sin, since it weakens the life of the soul, compels God to withhold His graces from us, and increases the violence of our passions. But when we consider that these three causes work together upon the soul, it becomes quite manifest that there is nothing which leads more cer-

tainly to the abyss of grievous sin than the reckless habit of deliberate venial sin. And if a man has thus once been drawn gradually into mortal sin, his conversion is much more difficult than if he had fallen at once, being suddenly carried away by a violent temptation. For one who has suddenly fallen into a dark, winding cave is frightened and cries for help, while one who gradually makes his way into it becomes accustomed to its darkness and horror and does not think of calling for aid until he is lost in its dark recesses, and all aid is impossible. But venial sin not only leads to grievous sin ; of itself it brings terrible punishments upon the sinner.

2. And, in fact, beloved brethren, venial sin must be a dreadful evil, since the all-merciful God has set such *terrible punishments* upon it, both in this life and in the life to come.

With regard to the punishments *in this life*, Holy Scripture affords us more instances than we have time to adduce. You all know the punishment that was inflicted on Lot's wife for one slight sin of disobedience. Mary, the sister of Moses, was suddenly stricken with leprosy for no other sin than murmuring against her brother. Moses himself, who had worked such wonders and obtained such merits in the service of God, was for one slight sin of diffidence shut out of the Land of Promise. The Bethsamites only looked rather curiously at the Ark of the Covenant, and many thousands of them were delivered up to death, while Oza, who laid his hand upon it, fell dead upon the spot. On account of a sin of vanity which David had committed the whole people was visited with a dreadful pestilence, and in three days seventy thousand of his subjects fell as victims by the sword of the angel of death.

But should these examples and many others which I might mention not suffice to show us the evil of venial sin, let us cast a glance at its punishment in *the next life*—at the doleful and helpless condition of the suffering souls in purgatory, at their afflictions and torments, both from the positive pains which they have to endure, and the remorse of conscience which continually reminds them how foolishly they have acted in this life, and how easily they could have avoided this punishment. I must leave the rest to your own consideration. What I have said will suffice to convince you that venial sin is not, what you may have taken it to be, a mere trifle, but a very great evil.

Let us, then, beloved brethren, shake off our lukewarmness, and in future carefully avoid all, even the least deliberate venial sins; but particularly let us guard against those to which we are most inclined. It is only by doing this that we shall lead a true Christian life, and look forward with hope to the consoling words of our Divine Master: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. xxv. 21). Amen.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

THE BELIEF IN ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

"Then the king said to the waiters: Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."—Matt. xxii. 13.

THE judgment passed upon this unbidden guest, who was not arrayed in the nuptial garment, is but an imperfect figure of the sentence which will be pronounced and executed upon the impenitent sinner. For earthly kings have power only over the body; the eternal King of heaven and earth has power over body and soul. But the most terrible feature of the punishment inflicted by God upon the sinner is its *eternity*—a feature which, though incomprehensible in its nature, is nevertheless most explicitly taught us by our faith. It is upon this feature of the punishment of sin that I intend to dwell in my present discourse. It is my intention to show you what salutary effects the firm belief in the eternity of punishment produces upon the life of the Christian. But since faith can only then have a salutary influence upon us when it is a firm and unshaken faith, and as there are in our days not wanting such as call themselves Christians, and yet, following the perverse promptings of their own depraved hearts rather than the manifest teaching of Revelation, do not hesitate to call this truth into question, it will be well first to show how firmly this belief is grounded upon the word of God, whose authority is sacred and inviolable with all Christians

alike; I shall, therefore, show you that the *belief in eternal punishment—*

1. *Rests upon the authority of God's word;*
2. *Is a powerful incentive to a Christian life.*

I. IT RESTS UPON THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD.

The word of God is so explicit on this truth that it fully removes all doubts and errors that exist upon the subject, and supplements and completes the knowledge which reason itself supplies upon the matter.

1. With regard to the first point it will be sufficient to refer to *two principal errors*, one of which is falsely based upon the *goodness*, the other upon the *justice* of God.

a. God, they say, is infinitely *good*, and cannot, therefore, eternally punish the sinner. From the goodness of God follows just the contrary. For, since God is infinitely good, infinitely loves what is good and infinitely hates what is evil, therefore He must infinitely, that is, eternally, punish evil. Or must not His hatred of evil correspond exactly to His love of good? And is that not precisely shown in the fact that He punishes evil in the same measure as He rewards good? How, then, can the goodness of God be appealed to against the eternity of punishment? Is this not, on the contrary, a manifest consequence of the divine goodness?

But the *word of God* much more simply and efficaciously removes this error. For the same divine word which teaches that God is infinitely good and infinitely loves what is good, teaches at the same time that the punishment of the damned is everlasting. To select only a few texts from the numerous testimonies of Holy Writ, Jesus Christ, Himself the Judge of the living and the dead, gives us in the Gospel of St. Matthew the words of the sentence that will be pro-

nounced upon the damned on the last day: "Then He shall say to them that shall be on His left hand: Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (xxv. 41). And immediately after, He says: "And these [i. e., the reprobate] shall go into everlasting punishment, but the just, into everlasting life" (Ibid. 46). And of the same St. John in the Apocalypse (xiv. 11) says: "And the smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever." If, then, on the authority of Holy Scripture, we believe in the goodness of God, must we not on the same authority believe in the eternity of punishment? To accept the authority of the word of God in one case and reject it in the other is a manifest contradiction.

b. The second error consists in this that they take the eternity of punishment to be irreconcilable with the *justice* of God. For, they say, must not the punishment be proportioned to the sin? How, then, can God eternally punish a sin which has been committed in an instant? It might be answered that the punishment of sin must, by all means, be in the strictest proportion to the sin, not in regard to its duration, however, but in regard to its malice, and that sin, in regard to its malice, though committed in an instant, is an infinite evil, since by it the absolute and infinite right of God to our obedience is outrageously trampled under foot with full knowledge and deliberation. We might refer to the civil law, which in a certain sense inflicts an everlasting punishment on crimes of brief duration. For the end of capital punishment is not the physical death of the criminal, which may be all but instantaneous, but his removal from human society, a punishment which lasts forever, and is in no proportion to the duration of the crime.

Yet this error, which is falsely based on divine jus-

tice, like that which they try to establish on divine goodness, is more clearly and efficaciously refuted from the *word of God*, which cannot mislead us. Now, the divine word teaches, on the one hand, that God is infinitely just, and, on the other hand, that the punishment He inflicts upon the sinner shall have no end, as we have seen from the unmistakable passages which I have quoted. Therefore there is and can be no contradiction between God's infinite justice and eternal retribution. As surely, then, as God is infinitely good and infinitely just, so surely will He punish sin with never ending torments.

2. The word of God, however, not only refutes the popular errors in regard to eternal punishment, but also *supplements and completes the knowledge* which human reason supplies on the subject.

Our reason is not so impotent as to leave us altogether ignorant in this matter. On the contrary, there are reasons accessible to the human mind which go to prove that the sinner *deserves* eternal punishment, and that God, consequently, has the *right* to inflict upon him punishment without end. To be brief, I shall advance only one of these reasons. St. Augustine proposes it in the following manner. The punishment which the sinner deserves, he says, must be proportioned to the malice of his will. For it is the perverseness of the will that makes the sinner punishable in the eyes of God. Now, the malice of the will has no limits in regard to time; for the sinner, as far as he is concerned, has the will to resist Almighty God forever, if God only allowed him to live so long. For, why do sinners cling to this life? Is it not to seek their happiness in the indulgence of their passions, and because this life affords them the opportunity of gratifying their desires? This is manifest. For, would not life be altogether insup-

portable to them, if they were unable to indulge their passions? And would they not willingly renounce heaven forever, if they could only continue their sinful career unmolested in this life? Do you not see, then, that the sinner is disposed to resist God forever, if God only afforded him the possibility of doing so? This being the case, it is manifest that the malice of the sinner has no limits in regard to time, and that the sinner, therefore, merits a punishment without limit of time, that is, an eternal punishment, and that, consequently, God has a perfect right to inflict such punishment upon him.

Now, that God *really exercises this right*, which human reason itself must concede to Him, and actually inflicts everlasting punishment upon the sinner, is most clearly revealed to us in Holy Scripture. The word of God, therefore, supplements and completes the teaching of reason on the subject of eternal punishment. It puts it beyond all possibility of a prudent doubt, efficaciously brings it home to all minds, puts all in the full possession of the truth concerning it. Our belief in the eternity of punishment, therefore, rests on the unshaken foundation of the word of God.

But, as the word of God confirms us in the belief in eternal punishment, so, on the other hand, this unwavering faith in the eternity of divine retribution is for us a most powerful motive to lead a truly Christian life.

II. IT IS A POWERFUL INCENTIVE TO A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

The belief in eternal punishment is the most powerful incentive to the exercise of Christian virtue, because it is the strongest, most universal, and most palpable of all motives.

1. It is the *strongest motive*. It puts us the dreadful

alternative either to lead a Christian life or to be eternally unhappy. It leaves us no choice. Or is there any other means to escape eternal misery than either innocence or penance? And for the one as well as for the other it is absolutely necessary to decide on leading a Christian life. If, then, to avoid temporal death, or even to defer it for a short time, we are ready to make any sacrifice, what should we not do to escape eternal death, to eschew the torments of hell, where the reprobate have no other prospect than for endless eternity to undergo unspeakable torments? Should we not, on considering this stringent truth, resolve at all costs to be reconciled with God and henceforth to lead a truly Christian life?

2. But the belief in the eternity of punishment is at the same time the *most universal* motive. For, although other motives are nobler and more perfect, yet there is no other which is to such an extent suited for all—for the just as well as for sinners.

For *sinners* it is the best suited of all motives; for, according to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ecclus. i. 16). In fact, if we speak to the sinner of the love of God, or the joys of heaven, sunk in sin and sensual as he is, it will, as a rule, make little impression on him. He is not fit to take it in. "The sensual man," says the Apostle, "perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God" (I. Cor. ii. 14). But, if the dreadful words of the Last Judgment are made to ring in his ears: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire;" if he is brought down in spirit into the abyss of hell; if he is shown that sea of fire in which the damned are tortured; if he is taught to realize the misery, the remorse, the fury, the despair, with which the reprobate in vain deplore the errors of their lives;

if he is then asked, with the words of the Prophet Isaias, whether he thinks he can dwell eternally in these raging flames (Isa. xxxiii. 14), he will surely, if a spark of faith remains in him, recoil from the danger that threatens him, and make the resolve to amend his life.

But, also for *good Christians*, the consideration of eternal punishment is most salutary and very advisable, especially when they are assailed by violent temptations. However perfect a man may be, he must not neglect at times, according to the example of the greatest saints, to return to the consideration of the eternal punishment of sin. He must consider as addressed to himself the words of the Holy Ghost: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40).

3. The consideration of eternal punishment is, finally, the *most palpable* of all motives, because the sufferings which it puts before us work upon our senses and feelings and make a deep and indelible impression on them. 'Tis true, pleasure, also, works upon the feelings, but the longer it lasts, the more it loses its attraction, and in the long run it produces satiety and loathing. But the case is different with sensual pain or suffering. An insignificant pain becomes the more sensitive the longer it lasts, and finally proves unbearable. What impression must, then, be produced by the consideration of a suffering which is so terrible in itself, and lasts throughout the endless space of eternity? If, therefore, one is assailed by a grievous temptation, for instance, against purity, or if there is question of confessing certain sins, which one may have long suppressed through false shame; if an occasion of sin is to be abandoned, or a sinful connection to be broken off; if ill-gotten goods are to be restored, or if one discovers that to save his soul he

must cast off his lukewarmness and begin a new, fervent, Christian life, it is well to take refuge to this eternal truth and make it the subject of daily meditation. And herein we can avail ourselves with profit, according to the example of the saints, of certain comparisons, in order that the eternity of punishment may make a deeper impression on us. Imagine the countless number of stars that are scattered over the firmament; add to this the number of drops of water of which all the oceans, and seas, and lakes, and rivers are composed; and the number of grains of sand on the seashore; and ask yourself: when I have been so many years, so many hundreds, so many thousands of years burning in the flames of hell, is then eternity at an end? No; and why not? Because it is eternity, and as eternity it has no end!

If you thus make profitable use of the belief in eternity, you will find it easy, with the grace of God, which is never wanting, to overcome every temptation, to make every sacrifice for the salvation of your souls, and to practise every Christian virtue. Let us, then, beloved brethren, during life often descend in spirit into the abyss of hell, that we may not have the misfortune after death to descend in reality, but that we may by the aid of the holy fear of God, which is the surest way to His holy love, work our salvation and gain everlasting life. **Amen.**

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.

ZEAL FOR THE HONOR OF OUR RELIGION.

"And himself believed, and his whole house."—John iv. 53.

THIS ruler, whose faith is proposed for our imitation in the gospel of to-day, in consequence of the miracle which Our Lord worked upon his son, not only believed himself, but, filled with religious zeal, gained over his whole household to the faith. A similar zeal should much more animate us, beloved brethren, who are not neophytes in the faith, but have tasted of its sweets and its blessings. Nor is this zeal for our religion on our part a matter of choice, but a grave duty. For, as it is our duty to love and honor God, our last end, the source of all our happiness, so we are also in duty bound to love and esteem the means which God has given us to obtain this end and reach the fountain of bliss. But the means that leads us to God is our holy religion. The *zeal for the honor of our religion* is, therefore, a duty that is inseparable from the zeal for the honor and glory of God, which is our highest duty here on earth. Therefore I have determined to-day briefly to lay before you what this duty of zeal for the honor of our religion requires of us. And I say that it demands two things from us, viz., the open and fearless profession of our faith, and a life which is not only internally pious and virtuous, but also externally edifying. These two demands, which our holy religion makes upon our zeal, are based upon two attributes of the faith we profess:

its infallible truth and its immaculate holiness. Therefore I say—

1. *Our religion is true;* therefore we must honor it by the *profession of our faith;*

2. *Our religion is holy;* therefore we must honor it by an *edifying life.*

I. THE PROFESSION OF OUR FAITH.

1. *Our religion is true;* consequently we must openly and fearlessly profess our faith in it. Not, indeed, all that is true must be openly confessed, but the true religion must be publicly professed before all men. For, as the Apostle says, "with the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10); whereby he clearly hints that the faith which is in the heart, though it is the root and foundation of justice, yet does not avail us unto salvation, unless it is externally confessed. And the reason is manifest; because to neglect to confess our faith openly is to be ashamed of our religion, which is to dishonor our faith. It is, therefore, a duty of conscience for us openly to profess our faith. And this duty is so grave that he who neglects it, according to St. Thomas, makes himself culpable in three ways—

a. In regard to God, whom he deprives of the honor due to Him. For, as our whole being, our body as well as our soul, has been created for the honor of God, so the whole man, both body and soul, must bear its part in the worship of God, in the functions of religion. Hence it is our duty to honor God also externally. But he who neglects to profess his faith openly manifestly deprives God of the external honor that is due to Him, and thus makes himself culpable and punishable before God.

b. He who neglects to profess his faith openly makes himself culpable also in the *eyes of the Church.* Why?

Because he fails to fulfil a grave duty which he owes to the Church. For the Church has the perfect right to exact from him the open profession of his faith. It was on this condition, and on the express promises made in his behalf by his sponsors, that she received him into her bosom at his baptism. And these promises he is strictly bound to redeem, as soon as he comes to the use of reason. The Church has, therefore, the right to require of him that he fulfil those promises in view of which she has conferred on him the gift of faith; in other words, to exact that he openly profess his faith. If, then, he refuses to do so, he violates the right of the Church and makes himself guilty of a grave disloyalty and base ingratitude towards her.

c. Moreover, he who neglects to profess his faith openly violates his *duty towards his fellow-Christians.* For by such behavior he refuses to his brethren, who are members of the same mystic body of Christ, that assistance against their enemies which he strictly owes them. Or, are not the members of the same body bound to render each other mutual aid? Does not the well-being of the whole body require this? But we are all members of the same body, members of the mystic body of Jesus Christ, who is our head. Are we not pledged, then, to mutual assistance? And this assistance consists chiefly in this, that we openly profess our faith in word and deed, and thus exhort and strengthen each other in the faith.

Hence you see, beloved brethren, that when we neglect to confess our faith openly we make ourselves guilty of a threefold injustice: an injustice against God, against the Church, and against our fellow-men, and that the open profession of our faith is, consequently, for us a strict and sacred duty. And the higher our position, influence, and authority are, the more strictly this

duty binds us. Hence a particular responsibility in this regard rests upon parents towards their children, on masters towards those who are under their control, on the elder members of families towards the younger. For it is evident that the good or evil example of those placed in position and authority tends in no small degree to the honor or dishonor of faith and religion. So much in regard to the duty of honoring our faith by publicly professing it.

2. But now, beloved brethren, ask yourselves sincerely, *how you fulfil this duty.* Are your speech and behavior, in regard to faith and all that is closely connected with it, such as tend to the honor of religion? Is it for the honor of religion if certain people manage to live for years in such a way that their most intimate friends could hardly tell whether they have any religion or not? Is it for the honor of religion if people profess the faith, but, at the same time, scoff at pious and God-fearing persons; at the priests and the word of God, which they preach; at the ceremonies and devotions of the Church; at sodalities and confraternities; at the frequent reception of the sacraments—in short, if they try to make piety and the practice of Christian virtue ridiculous? Is it for the honor of religion if those who shrink from no expenses when there is question of enjoyments and luxuries, leave the support of Church and schools entirely to their neighbors? Is it for the honor of religion when Christians, who hardly know the elements of the Christian doctrine, take the liberty of freely criticising those points of the faith which they do not find according to their taste; who, to use the words of the Apostle St. Jude, "blaspheme whatever things they know not"? (Jude i. 10.) Is it for the honor of religion if parents teach their children principles that are diametrically opposed to the teachings of faith—

that honor is the highest good, that they must, therefore, never overlook or forgive an offence; that their happiness consists in riches, and influence, and enjoyments? Is it for the honor of religion, again, if parents, to the great scandal of their children, speak with indifference, or even with contempt, of prayer, divine service, and the sacraments? Is it, finally, for the honor of religion, if Christians at every instant in the course of their conversation profane the holy names of God and Jesus Christ, and can hardly open their lips without blasphemies, curses, and imprecations? Is it not revolting and heart-rending to see and hear Christians, who owe everything—their dignity, their peace and happiness in this world, and their hope for a happy eternity—to their religion, dishonor their faith and religion so outrageously?

If the first Christians, instead of confessing their religion in word and deed, and bearing testimony to it by the endurance of the most inhuman tortures and the shedding of their blood, had thus dishonored it, what would have become of Christianity? What would have become of us? We should now be sunk in that ignorance and barbarism in which centuries ago our pagan forefathers languished. Let us, then, henceforth honor our religion by the open profession of our faith, and thus prove that we are no unworthy imitators of the early Christians. But, as our religion is not only true but also holy, we must honor it, not only by the open profession of our faith, but also by the edification of our lives.

II. THE EDIFICATION OF OUR LIVES.

1. *Our religion is holy.* It is holy in every regard: holy in its Founder, holy in its teaching, holy in its commandments, holy in its sacraments, holy in its sac-

rifice and in its divine worship. Its sanctity is its grandest and most honorable attribute. Hence it follows that nothing so dishonors our holy religion as what obscures or casts a shade upon its sanctity. But what displays the sanctity of our religion in the most brilliant light is the edifying life of its adherents; on the other hand, what obscures the splendor of its sanctity is the sinful life of those who externally profess themselves as its members. True, our religion is holy independently of the life of individual members; and though a considerable number of its adherents should be forgetful of the sanctity they profess, the Christian religion itself would not therefore cease to be holy. And why? Because it never ceases to detest and condemn all wickedness. But if you would honor your religion, as it is your duty to do, you must endeavor to lead edifying lives.

Therefore the Apostle exhorts the faithful so urgently to lead an edifying life. "I therefore," he says, "a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called, with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity" (Eph. iv. 1, 2). And again, "Let your conversation be worthy of the Gospel of Christ" (Phil. i. 27). Hence the holy Fathers of the Church were so anxious to remove all scandal from the life of the faithful, because they did not look merely to the welfare of individuals, but had the honor of religion at heart. It was, in fact, the edifying lives of the Christians that often soothed the most bitter enemies of Christianity, and extorted their reverence and approval. It is, therefore, beyond all doubt that *the honor and influence of religion depends to a great extent on the life of its adherents.*

2. Now, you all have the good fortune to belong

to the true religion of Jesus Christ. The honor and influence of this religion, therefore, depends not a little on the edification of your lives. *Are your lives really edifying?* Would to God that we could, without restriction, answer this question in the affirmative! But alas! although there are many amongst you whose earnest endeavor it is faithfully to fulfil all your Christian duties, and whose edifying lives do all honor to their religion, yet there may be not a few who are justly conscious to themselves that their lives are anything but edifying. Or, is it edifying when those that call themselves Catholics have so little respect for their faith and religion that, without any necessity, they seek the society of non-Catholics and infidels, listen to their slanderous remarks on the Church and on religion without protest, or even with approval? Is it edifying if they show so little regard for the Church as wantonly to violate her commandments before the eyes of all; if they spend the Sundays and holy-days in drinking and dissipation instead of going to church and spending the day in a Christian manner; if without fear or shame they violate the laws of fasting and abstinence?

Is it edifying when Christians utterly neglect the duties of their state; when parents quarrel in the presence of their children; when they allow their children such liberties as are most dangerous to their salvation; when the father, who should be a model to his children, comes home under the influence of drink; and the mother, instead of attending to her household duties, seems to have no more important concern than to retail all she knows or can conjecture against her neighbors? Is it edifying to see Catholic Christians, who acknowledge Him as their head and teacher who has stript Himself of all things and lived in the utmost

poverty—to see those who profess themselves the followers of Jesus Christ, so engrossed in the pursuit of riches that business is their highest aim, that they regard the success of their neighbors with jealousy and envy, and do not scruple to use unjust means of increasing their wealth?

Tertullian, the famous defender of Christianity, once addressed the blood-thirsty persecutors of the Christians in the following words: "See how we live, and you will no longer despise our faith. There is among us neither fraud nor injustice; neither treacherous nor immoral characters. You have Christians in your prisons, but their only crime is the name which they bear and the faith which they profess in that name. What other accusation can you bring against them? What crime can you lay to their charge? We come together, it is true, but only to invoke God, and to do works of penance. Do we inflict any wrong on any one? Do we not, on the contrary, do good to all men? What duty do we neglect? From our life, therefore, infer what we are; and from what we are infer what manner of faith we profess, which makes us what we are." Now, I ask, beloved brethren, if this great Doctor were to appear in our midst, could he use the same language? Now, it is true, we do not live among idolaters; but we live among heretics and infidels. And would not many of these form quite a different opinion of our holy faith and religion, and accept it as theirs, if our lives were like those of the first Christians, and the defenders of our faith could speak of us as Tertullian does of his own contemporaries? And yet our faith is the same as that of the first Christians. It supplies us with the same means, and holds out to us the same reward.

Let us, then, endeavor, beloved brethren, to live like

those early Christians, and so to honor our holy religion. Let us honor it by professing it openly and fearlessly; let us honor it by the sanctity of our lives. Then we shall be enabled in our last moments to say with the Apostle: "I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me in that day" (II. Tim. iv. 7, 8). Amen.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost.

FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

"So also shall My heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."—Matt. xviii. 35.

In to-day's gospel, which closes with the words I have quoted, Our Lord Jesus Christ exhorts us to forgive from our hearts all injuries that may be inflicted upon us; and this to such an extent as not merely to renounce all revenge, but also to return good for the evil that has been done to us. Availing myself of the occasion the gospel offers, and following the example and teaching of our blessed Lord, I shall to-day take for my subject the *forgiveness of injuries*, and briefly put before you the motives that should urge us generously to pardon and sincerely to forgive all wrongs and offences that may be committed against us. These motives may be reduced to three principal heads: (1) *the honor*, (2) *the justice*, and (3) *the necessity* of forgiving injuries.

I. IT IS HONORABLE.

The first motive of forgiving injuries and renouncing all revenge for offences, of whatever kind they may be, and of returning not evil, but good, for evil done to us, is the honor and respect which we owe to ourselves.

1. Honor demands that we carefully *avoid all that is degrading*. Now, whatever may be the prejudices of the world, revenge is an act of self-degradation. It is not, by any means, as many are inclined to think,

a mark of strength and courage, but, on the contrary, the characteristic of *weakness and cowardice.*

This is, in the first place, the manifest teaching of *experience.* For, beloved brethren, what kind of men are those, as a rule, who cannot pardon anything, but will have revenge for every trifle? They will commonly be found to be men who are weak in soul and body. Yea, the weaker a creature is, the more it is wont to be inclined to revenge, as we may perceive in the instance of certain sickly individuals, and even of the animals themselves.

Reason itself teaches us the same truth. For, what is the spirit of revenge? It is an animal passion. To take revenge, therefore, means to succumb to this brutal passion. But is that not evidently weakness and cowardice? Is it not weakness and cowardice if at every trifle one loses his self-control, and allows himself to be carried away by the passion of anger?

This truth is so evident that it was known and acknowledged even by the *heathens.* Seneca, a Roman philosopher, says, if not in these exact words, at least according to the sense: only weaklings take revenge; a noble-hearted man considers it beneath his dignity to do so. And Aristotle, the prince of pagan philosophers, says: as a weak stomach cannot digest hard food, so a weak mind is unable to bear a harsh word.

But the most manifest evidence of this weakness and cowardice is the *confession* of the culprit himself. To extort this confession from him, you have only to ask him why he wishes to take revenge. He will say that it is because the offence is so great that he cannot bear it—mark well—he cannot bear it, that is, he is too weak and cowardly to bear it. Is that not a frank confession of his weakness and cowardice? And what kind of outrage is this, which appears so unbearable to him? In-

quire, and you will, in most cases, find that it is only a contemptuous word, or, perhaps, a mere offensive look. But how weak and cowardly must not be the man who cannot even endure such a trifling mark of contempt! Is it not manifest, then, that revenge is truly a self-debasement?

2. But our honor, if rightly understood, demands that we not only avoid what is disgraceful, but also that we *do what is honorable*. If, therefore, we would act upon the principles of honor, we must not content ourselves with renouncing revenge and abstaining from returning evil for evil; we must go still further, and follow the counsel of the Apostle, who says: "If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him drink; for, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good" (Rom. xii. 20–21). In other words, if we would perfectly fulfil the duties of honor and Christian magnanimity, we must return evil, not with evil, but with good, that is, with prayer and other acts of charity. That is a retribution, or, if you will, a revenge, which is truly Christian and honorable. This is the revenge which the truly great and powerful are wont to take. Who is greater and mightier than God? And yet, how does He revenge the offences which we daily commit against Him? Does He not daily lavish His favors on us? That is the revenge which He takes on us.

Very true, you will say; but no one will account it as a weakness on the part of God if He pardons offences, whereas, if I act in the same way, *it will be interpreted as weakness* and cowardice. But, let me ask you, my dear friend, who is it that will thus judge you? Is it the good and the virtuous? Is it those who are imbued with a Christian spirit? Certainly not; these will only

respect you the more. It is only unreasonable, un-Christian, and impious men that will thus judge you. But what importance need you attach to the judgment of such men? Does the artist ask the opinion of the blind? And are not such men stark blind in regard to the things that appertain to true honor? Were not the divine patience and meekness with which our blessed Lord bore the outrages inflicted upon Him interpreted as weakness? Did the Jews not shake their heads, and say: "He saved others; Himself He cannot save"? (Matt. xxvii. 42.) Was Jesus moved to revenge by this reproach? On the contrary, He prayed: "Father, forgive them!"

But, you will say, Christ is almighty, while *I am but a weak man.* By this excuse, at least, you confess your weakness. How inconsistent is this with your ordinary plea! For, when you advance your weakness as an excuse you tacitly admit that it is noble to overcome evil with good. But how miserable is your excuse! Were not the saints also weak men like you? Think of Joseph of Egypt and his inhuman brothers; think of David, and Saul, his mortal enemy; think of St. Stephen and those that stoned him to death; think of the millions of martyrs and their cruel torturers. Were they not all weak men and women? And yet, look at their heavenly meekness and forbearance! How sincerely did they forgive! How ardently did they pray for their enemies! And did they not know the worth and the demands of honor?

That is all very well, you say; but *these were saints*, which I am not. Vain excuse! Is revenge less degrading in you, because you are no saint? My dear friend, Lycurgus, the famous lawgiver of pagan antiquity, was no saint; he was not even a Christian. Once, while he was holding a public speech, one of the audience dealt

him a blow in the face that brought him reeling to the ground. And how did he requite the insult? Did he take revenge? No; he did not rest until he had soothed the rage of the indignant multitude and saved the life of his offender. And Lycurgus was a pagan! And how did the Roman Cato act when the same insult was offered to him in the senate? Did he take revenge? No; he bore it with absolute silence! And yet Cato was a heathen! You say you are no saint. It is sadly true; but are you not at least a Christian? What a shame, then, if you would allow yourself to be surpassed in meekness by the very pagans! Honor and self-respect, therefore, demand of us that we forgive injuries from our hearts and return good for evil. But justice is no less loud in its claims.

II. IT IS JUST.

Justice requires that we avoid all that is wrong, or unjust to another. But revenge inflicts a wrong, or real *injustice*, and that in three different regards.

1. First, it is a wrong *against the person on whom it is exercised.* For he who takes revenge claims a right which he does not possess—that of returning like for like. If you strike me, he says, I have a right to strike you; and if you abuse me I have the right of abusing you. Thus he excuses himself and appeals to his supposed right. But *he possesses no such right.* If he had such a right, every crime might eventually be lawful for him. If any one belied, cheated, or slandered him, he might, in his turn, belie, cheat, or slander his offender, and so return every offence in kind, no matter how sinful it were in itself. But who does not see the injustice and sinfulness of such behavior?

Besides, it were absolutely *impossible to exercise such a right.* For, in order to return like for like, and not to

exceed the just measure of equality, one must know exactly the greatness of the offence, which no one but God alone can measure. And yet, if this were possible, the offended party would not possess the necessary calmness and self-possession not to exceed the limits of justice. His heart is like troubled water, in which all objects are reflected in a distorted form. Therefore we see that a trifling offence is often revenged with the greatest cruelty—by mutilation or even by murder. Hence the general principle that no one can be a judge in his own cause. But he who takes revenge makes himself not only judge, but also executioner in his own cause.

2. For the same reason revenge is an *injustice to human society* at large. He who avenges himself practically establishes the principle of private retribution. But this principle, if practically applied, would evidently destroy all order and possibility of social intercourse, and thereby, sooner or later, lead to the utter ruin of the human race. Is it not, therefore, an outrage against human society to establish such a pernicious principle?

3. But, most of all, revenge is an *injustice against God*. It is a flagrant invasion of the sovereign right of Almighty God. The vindictive man usurps a right which God has expressly and exclusively reserved for Himself. For in the Epistle to the Romans (xii. 19) we read: Revenge not yourselves, dearly beloved; for it is written: revenge is Mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord.

Revenge is, therefore, a wrong, a manifest injustice against individuals, against society, and against God, the supreme judge of mankind. Justice, therefore, requires that we renounce all revenge. But what does it mean to renounce revenge? It means that we

should not only abstain from inflicting any injury on our offenders, but that we should banish all rancor and ill-will towards them from our hearts. It means that we should love our enemies from our hearts, pray for them, and, when occasion demands, show them real favors; in short, it means that we should return not evil, but good, for evil. Such is the absolute demand of justice, but it is also a strict obligation of necessity.

III. IT IS NECESSARY.

All will easily admit that it is necessary to save our souls, and, consequently, to renounce all that makes salvation impossible. Now, among those things that *make salvation impossible* is revenge.

1. This impossibility follows, first of all, from the *words of our blessed Lord:* "I say to you, love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you" (Matt. v. 44). According to the unanimous interpretation of divines, these words make the love of our enemies a positive obligation. And what is the character of this commandment? It is, in the first place, a most important one; for, to say nothing of the fact that the matter, being the love of our neighbor, is most important, the gravity of this precept is sufficiently manifested in its wording. The divine Legislator avails Himself of the most forcible expression, "I say to you," that is, I, your Lord and your God, command you! Therefore it is a commandment which, according to the teaching of the Church, binds under grievous sin. Nor does this commandment of Our Lord admit of exception or excuse, since it is nothing else than the general commandment of the love of our neighbor applied to our enemies, which binds at all times and under all circumstances, and the observance of which depends not

on any external circumstances, but merely on our own free will. But is it not manifest that revenge is a direct violation of this commandment of Our Lord, and, consequently, that it makes salvation impossible?

The same doctrine is clearly laid down by our Divine Saviour in His answer to the question of St. Peter, *how often* we are to forgive an offender. Must we forgive seven times, asks the Apostle? Yea, says Our Lord: "I say not to thee, till seven times; but till seventy times seven times" (Matt. xviii. 22), that is, again and again, indefinitely. And to confirm His teaching He relates the parable which is read in the gospel of to-day, and lest any doubt should remain of the doctrine contained in it, He adds: "So also shall My heavenly Father do to you, unless you forgive every one his brother from your hearts" (Ibid. 35). The king in the parable, therefore, is God; and we are the servants; and you, who will not forgive your enemy, who will have revenge—you are the merciless servant. O my dear friend, remember the offences which you committed against God by your numberless sins. And yet, how has God dealt with you? And after He has remitted you the great debt of your sins, you mercilessly fall upon your fellow-servant, upon your neighbor, who owes you so little. Woe to you, ungrateful, hard-hearted servant! What a terrible lot awaits you! For you there is no forgiveness! No forgiveness in life, no forgiveness in death, no forgiveness in time, no forgiveness in eternity! "Judgment without mercy to him that hath not done mercy" (James ii. 13). "With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. vii. 2).

2. Besides, the vindictive man *challenges God* to judge him without mercy. Does he not do so expressly as

often as he says the Lord's Prayer? Does he not daily repeat the words: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"? Is that not as much as to say: forgive us *not* our trespasses unless we forgive our trespassers? Is that not as much as to say: O Lord, I hate my neighbor; do Thou, in like manner, hate me! I curse him; do Thou, in like manner, curse me! I shall have revenge on him; do Thou, O Lord, take revenge on me! O merciful God, what kind of prayer is this! Is this the prayer of a Christian or even of a human being? Do you not see, then, my dear friend, that, as long as you persevere in the spirit of revenge, you cannot even recite the "Our Father" without loading the most terrible curses and imprecations upon your own head?

The unchangeable decree of Almighty God, beloved brethren, is now clearly before you: *either forgiveness or—damnation!* Nothing on earth or in heaven can save you, unless you forgive your enemies from your hearts. In vain would you distribute all your goods to the poor; however pleasing to Almighty God is the Christian work of alms-giving, it were of no avail, unless you forgive: forgiveness, or damnation! In vain would you invoke the mercy of God day and night; in vain would you retire to the seclusion of the cloister or the desert, and there practise unheard of austerities: forgiveness, or damnation! Nay, in vain would you ascend the funeral-pile, or stretch your limbs upon the rack, to give your life for the faith amid the most excruciating tortures: either forgiveness, or damnation! There is no escape.

But need I insist upon this terrible alternative before Christians whose hearts are susceptible of love and gratitude? Let me ask you, instead, to lift up your eyes to *the cross*, and behold the Man of Sorrows,

nailed to that tree of shame. Oh, who can conceive His tortures and sufferings! Yet, this sufferer, beloved brethren, is no mere man. He is the only Son of God, the God of glory and majesty, that suffers upon that cross. Now, I ask, for whom does He suffer thus; for whom does He die? You will say, He suffers and dies for us. But, who were we then, when He died for us? We were sinners, the children of wrath, His mortal enemies. The Son of God, therefore, dies for us, His deadly enemies! And what does He now ask of us in return? From the height of that cross, from amidst His unspeakable tortures, He cries to us: Brethren, I pray and beseech you, for the love you bear Me, to forgive all who have in aught offended you! Behold, that is the only request He would make of you, the only comfort in His sufferings which He asks of you. And will you refuse Him this request? Will you deny Him this consolation in His last agony? Oh, no, beloved brethren, your hearts are too noble, too generous and tender, to refuse the last request of your dying Saviour. Follow, then, my dear friends, this noble impulse of your hearts; and, without delay, generously forgive all your enemies; and the love and friendship of God will accompany you in this life, and His glory will be your portion in eternity. Amen.

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost.

DEFACEMENT OF THE IMAGE OF GOD.

"Render, therefore, to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and to God the things that are God's."—Matt. xxii. 21.

ACCORDING to the interpretation of St. Augustine, our blessed Lord wished to signify by these words that to Cæsar was due the tribute of money, but to God the tribute of ourselves. For, says the saint, as the emperor demands his own coin, so also God demands His. The emperor's coin is that piece of metal which bears his likeness; but God's coin is man, on whom His image and likeness are stamped. Now, the man who has defaced the image of God in his soul has ceased to be God's coin. And, in fact, as the emperor refuses to accept the coin which does not bear his impress, so Almighty God will not acknowledge as His in death the soul which does not bear His image. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we endeavor to preserve the image and likeness of God in our souls; and it is this truth which I would impress upon you to-day. For this end I shall show you that the *defacement of the image of God in our souls*—

1. *Is a great outrage done to God;*
2. *Brings a great punishment upon us.*

I. AN OUTRAGE AGAINST GOD.

1. That man *is made to the image and likeness of God* is a truth which needs no proof, as we have it expressed in the words of Holy Scripture: "Let us make

man to Our image and likeness" (Gen. i. 26). And that this image is engraven, not on the body, but on the soul, is evident, since the body is material and cannot possibly be the bearer of this spiritual likeness. The soul has, therefore, a certain resemblance to God. This resemblance consists partly in the natural gifts of the soul, viz., in man's intellect and free will, which he has in common with God; partly in supernatural gifts, which perfect the soul's likeness and make it His supernatural image. We have, therefore, a twofold likeness to God, a *natural* and a *supernatural.*

The *natural likeness* of God cannot be altogether effaced from our souls, because those natural gifts of which it consists belong to the essence of the soul, and like the soul itself can neither perish nor be destroyed. Thus God wished to impress His image indelibly on man, because he is the noblest of His visible creatures, and, as it were, the masterpiece of His divine handiwork. In the creation of man the almighty Artist has done as the famous sculptor Phidias, who in his statue of Pallas, the masterwork of his genius, inserted an image of himself in such a way that it could not be extracted without destroying the whole figure. In a similar manner God impressed His divine likeness on the noblest part of man, on the very essence of his soul, so that, like the soul itself, it might be imperishable. Therefore it cannot be effaced even by sin. However, although sin cannot totally efface the natural likeness of God from the soul, still it has an injurious effect upon it; for it blurs and disfigures it.

But, as I have said, there is still a higher and nobler image of God in the sanctified soul, a *supernatural likeness,* effected by the presence of sanctifying grace. For, since grace is a participation of the divine nature, it deifies the soul in a certain true sense, and thus ren-

ders it an incomparably more perfect image of God than it is of its own nature, so that the soul is not only a natural, but a supernatural image of its Creator.

Now, that which not only disfigures but completely *destroys* this supernatural likeness of God in the soul is *mortal sin.* For, since every grievous sin induces the loss of sanctifying grace, and since the supernatural likeness of God in the soul is the effect of sanctifying grace, the loss of grace must necessarily entail the loss of the supernatural likeness of God. This destructive effect of sin is hinted at in the Book of Genesis. No sooner had Adam sinned than he tried to hide himself from the face of the Most High. But God called to him: "Adam, where art thou?" (Gen. iii. 9.) Such a call seems singular on the part of God. Did the all-seeing God not know where Adam was? He certainly did. His call was, therefore, not a call of ignorance, but a call of indignation. According to the exposition of St. Chrysostom, God by these words, "Adam where art thou?" wished to say: Adam, where is My image, which I impressed upon thy soul by the infusion of My grace? In a similar manner God speaks through the prophet Jeremias. "I beheld the earth," says the prophet, "and lo it was void, and nothing. . . I beheld, and lo there was no man" (Jer. iv. 23, 25). There was no man: that is, according to the same St. Chrysostom, there was no one who had preserved sanctifying grace and the image of God unimpaired in his heart. Hence it is manifest, beloved brethren, that mortal sin, on the one hand, disfigures the natural likeness of God in the soul; and, on the other, totally effaces the supernatural likeness.

2. This being the case, it is easy to realize *how great an outrage* against God is the defacement of the divine image. To make this clear to you I shall avail myself

of a comparison. Of the many punishable crimes of which citizens can make themselves guilty against their rulers, high-treason stands in the first rank, because it is directed immediately against the person of the sovereign. This crime was in olden times reputed so great that no definite punishment was set upon it, but it was left altogether at the discretion of the judge. The emperor Theodosius considered the crime that was committed against himself and his wife by the profanation of their statues so grievous that he thought it could be atoned only by the wholesale slaughter of the inhabitants of Antioch. If, then, the profanation of the image of a prince or emperor is such an insult against his person, what shall we say of the outrage done to God, the Lord of lords and Ruler of rulers, when His divine image is disfigured and profaned and fully demolished—by grievous sin?

But, beloved brethren, the image of a sovereign is a lifeless figure; it has no share of the essence or nature of him whom it represents; neither is it the production of his art; and yet its profanation is so great an outrage against him. But would it not be a still greater insult if the image were the work of the sovereign's own hands, to which he had communicated his own life and nature? Now, the image of God, which we bear in our souls, is not a dead, but a *living* one, the participation of the divine life and nature, according to the teaching of the Prince of the Apostles, who says: "He hath given us very great and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature" (II. Pet. i. 4); and *God Himself is the author* and artist of His likeness in us. It is He Himself who impresses this divine likeness upon us. For, as St. Ambrose teaches, in accordance with the word of God, the divine image has been created in us in con-

sequence of the joint decree of the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity. How monstrous, then, is the outrage inflicted on the majesty of God by the profanation of this divine likeness!

What makes this crime still more enormous is the great sacrifice which the *restoration of the divine image* has cost Almighty God. For, after our first parents had defaced the image of God in their own souls and for all posterity, what effort did it not cost the Most High to repair it! Was it not on this account that the Son of God became man? Was it not on this account that He passed His life in poverty, sorrows, and sufferings? Was it not on this account that He sacrificed His life amid unutterable pangs on the cross? In short, was it not for the restoration of the image of God in us that the Son of God shed the last drop of His precious blood? Is not this likeness of God, therefore, of equal value with the precious blood of Jesus Christ—of infinite value? Can you imagine, then, a greater outrage against Almighty God than to profane the divine likeness, which is so dear to Him? What an indignity, therefore, is offered to the Divine Majesty by sin? But to the greatness of the outrage corresponds the severity of the penalty which God, the all-just Judge, has set upon this sacrilegious crime.

II. ITS JUST PUNISHMENT.

He who profanes the sacred image of God in his soul, and neglects to procure its restoration by the grace of God, brings a *twofold punishment* upon his own head—a severe punishment in the *present life*, and a severer one in the *life to come*.

1. The latter, i. e., the punishment in the *next life*, our blessed Lord illustrates clearly in the parable of the foolish virgins. They appealed to the bridegroom,

and implored him, saying: "Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answering, said: Amen, I say to you, I know you not" (Matt. xxv. 11, 12). The bridegroom signifies Almighty God; the marriage feast represents heaven; and the foolish virgins personate the sinner. All this is self-evident. But what is the meaning of the words, "I know you not"? These words, beloved brethren, indicate the reason why God eternally excludes the sinner from heaven. And what is that reason? Does God no more recognize the sinner? He certainly does; but, as St. Ambrose remarks, He no longer sees in him that beauteous image which He imprinted on his soul; He no more discovers in him sanctifying grace, whose divine features had transformed his soul into His own image and likeness. His sins have so disfigured his soul that he is no more recognizable. And therefore God addresses him with the terrible words: "I know thee not," and excludes him forever from His heavenly banquet. Yes, forever! That is the meaning of those words which God will once address to those who have defaced His divine image from their souls: "I know you not!" With these words He at once expresses their guilt and their punishment: their guilt, which consists in their having profaned His image and made themselves irrecognizable; and their punishment, which consists in their irremediable exclusion from the heavenly Bridegroom and from the joys of His everlasting banquet.

2. But even *in this life* the impenitent profaner of the divine image meets his dreadful and well-deserved punishment. For, whatever be the dissipation by which he may try to stifle the voice of conscience during life, the last hour will once come also for him. And what sentiments will then take possession of his heart? Where will he find comfort in this dreadful

hour? Nowhere, beloved brethren! For, if even the Church cannot comfort such an impenitent sinner; if the prayers which she offers to console the dying, instead of comforting him, only add to his fear and trembling, what can further comfort him? And that is really the case; for the prayers of the Church, consoling and encouraging as they are, have no other effect upon the impenitent sinner than to increase his horror and anguish. "Acknowledge, O Lord, Thy creature," says the Church through the mouth of the priest, invoking the divine mercy on the dying sinner. But instead of the divine mercy the justice of God responds in the heart of the impenitent sinner: "I know thee not!" What! God should recognize thee as His creature! But by what sign? By what divine traits? Where is the image of God on thy soul? It is disfigured by sin; it is blotted out from thy understanding by sinful thoughts; it is effaced from thy will by shameful lusts and wicked designs; it is profaned in thy imagination by filthy representations; it is defiled in thy memory by the recollection of thy degrading excesses. Hatred, revenge, intemperance, and lust have totally defaced it! And in that disfigured state God should acknowledge you as His creature, as the work of His hands! No, He says: "I know thee not!"

Such are the melancholy sentiments which the prayers of the Church awake in the heart of the impenitent sinner. How doleful, then, is his condition! And will you, beloved brethren, procure for yourselves such a death, and such an eternity? Oh, no, my friends, God forbid! On the contrary, as I hope, you are firmly resolved, at all costs, to avert such a misfortune. Beware, then, of profaning by grievous sin the glorious image of God, which is impressed upon your souls.

But if, perhaps, the image of God is already defaced from your souls, make haste to restore it by a good confession. But do not stop at this; endeavor also in future to perfect it, and bring it out daily more gloriously in your souls. And for this end turn your eyes to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the perfect image of the Father, and try to conform yourselves daily more and more to Him. Thus you shall come before the tribunal of God with His divine likeness resplendent upon your souls, and shall hear from His lips, not the terrible words: "I know you not," but the consoling welcome: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. xxv. 23). Amen.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

"And the girl arose."—Matt. ix. 25.

THE resuscitation of this deceased girl, which is related in the gospel of to-day, was a great favor conferred upon her by our blessed Lord, not only on account of the benefit of life, but especially because it afforded her an opportunity of preparing herself for her second and final death. For she learned by experience what it is to die, and how it behooves us to prepare for this awful moment. She could now easily eschew those mistakes she had committed in the preparation for her first death. However, we have no great cause to envy her good fortune; for, although we can die only once in reality, yet spiritually we may die not only twice, as she did, but repeatedly, and even daily. We need only often to think of death, and represent it to ourselves in a lively manner. Thus we may daily die, and our lives shall be an effectual preparation for death.

In order to commend this practice to you, I wish to show you two things:

1. *The necessity of preparation for death;*

2. *The efficacy of the frequent thought of death as a preparation.*

I. NECESSITY OF PREPARATION.

If it were not certain that we are once to die, or if death were a matter of small moment, or if it were an easy thing to die well without preparation, we might

dispense with, or defer our preparation indefinitely, at our convenience. But this is not the case; for, it is certain that we must die; it is certain that death is a matter of paramount importance; and it is no less certain that without mature preparation it is hard to die well; and for these reasons I say that preparation for death is a necessary duty of a Christian.

1. It is certain that *we must die.* Not one of us can escape death. Can a Christian, can a reasonable man or woman doubt this truth? The sentence of death is pronounced on every one of us. "It is appointed unto men once to die," says the Apostle (Heb. ix. 27). "Thou shalt die the death," is the penalty imposed on fallen man. And is there anything more familiar to us than death? We meet it at every step. We contemplate it daily in its image, sleep; we see it in its mournful pageantry, in the funeral procession; we see it in the bereavement and mourning of friends; we see it in the bitter agony of the dying; we see it in the pallid face of the dead. We daily hear and read of the harvest of death. And the various infirmities with which our friends or ourselves are visited, are they not unmistakable warnings that death is fast and surely approaching?

2. Death is, moreover, a matter of the *utmost importance.* It is the moment that decides our eternity. For, since we can die but once, death must decide our lot forever. As is our death, so shall be our eternity. If we die a good death, if we die in the grace and friendship of God, we shall be forever happy with God. But if we die the death of the sinner, if we die as the enemies of God, our lot shall be a terrible one, our eternity shall be an eternity of misery. Then all is lost; the soul is lost, the body is lost, health is lost, fortune is lost, honor is lost, friends are lost, happiness

—all is lost, and lost forever! In death, therefore, all is at stake; on this moment depends all that can make us happy or miserable for all eternity. Can you imagine any other moment of such consequence, of such paramount importance, as the awful moment of death, on which eternity depends?

3. Finally, without *timely preparation*, it is by no means easy to die well. For, what does it mean to die well? It means to die with a conscience free from sin, to die with resignation to the will of God, to die with Christian patience.

a. To die well we must die with a conscience *free from sin*, at least free from mortal sin. Above all, therefore, a good confession is necessary. Now, let us suppose one, as there are many, who till his last illness has thought little or not at all of preparing for death. For years he has either not confessed at all, or has not made a worthy confession. Now he must evidently make a general confession of ten or twenty years, or of his whole life-time. Do you think that is an easy matter for him? Is it an easy matter, in the face of death, amid the pangs of suffering, amid the tears and lamentations of relatives and friends, to examine his conscience, and that over a space of so many years? Is it an easy matter, under such circumstances, without any previous familiarity with acts of piety, perhaps for the first time in his life, to make an act of contrition from his heart? Is it an easy matter then to confess humiliating sins, which till then he has concealed or never rightly confessed? It is, therefore, a most difficult thing at the moment of death to cleanse one's conscience from the guilt of sin.

b. But a second and necessary disposition for a happy death is a perfect *resignation to the will of God*, who is Lord of life and death. And this disposition, too, is by

no means easy unless we have previously acquired it. For, what is death? Death is the complete separation from all things we hold dear in this life: from friends and relatives; from house and home, and fortune; from honors and distinctions; from all the pleasures of this world; the separation from our own bodies, which we have so loved and cherished in this life. Now, I ask you, beloved brethren, is such a separation an easy matter for him who is not practised in resignation to the will of God? Picture to yourselves a dying man, who is not armed with resignation—an ambitious, covetous, pleasure-loving man; a man of worldly disposition, whose whole heart clings to the goods, and honors, and pleasures of this world—will he look forward with resignation to this complete separation from the world and all it affords? No one who has ever had to deal with such people on their death-bed would say that he will.

c. Lastly, a necessary disposition for a happy death is *patience*. With patience the dying Christian must endure the pains of his sickness. But that is hardly possible for one who never practised patience in his life. Patience is not the growth of a day or a night; it is a virtue which of all virtues requires long and constant practice. A diligent preparation for death is, therefore, absolutely necessary—as necessary as it is certain that we all must die, that death is a matter of transcendent moment, and that we can hardly die well without long and diligent preparation.

And let us further remember, beloved brethren, that this preparation admits of no delay. We must prepare *at once*. Why? On account of the total uncertainty of the circumstances of our death. When shall we die? Will it be many years hence? Will it be this year, this month, this week, this very day? We know

not. Therefore "be you then also ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come" (Luke xii. 40). Where shall you die? At home, or in the church, or in the work-shop, or in the street, or in the drinking house, or in the ball-room? You know not. Therefore watch and be ready! How shall you die? After a protracted illness, or all on a sudden, without any warning symptoms; by a natural death, or a violent death? You know not. Therefore watch and be ready! Delay not your preparation; prepare at once, and be always prepared.

II. FREQUENT THOUGHT OF DEATH THE BEST MEANS.

The frequent thought of death is such an excellent means of preparing ourselves for a happy death, that, if we employ it diligently, death can hardly overtake us unprepared. For by this practice we shall easily obtain that disposition which is necessary as a preparation to die well, and secure ourselves a certain guarantee of a happy death. This disposition is hatred of sin, detachment from the things of this world, and a longing for things eternal.

1. The first disposition, then, necessary as a preparation for death is *hatred of sin*. For, on the one hand, it is sin that leads to an unhappy death, and, on the other, this detestation is the best safe-guard against sin. He who really detests sin will carefully flee from it, and avoid all occasions which lead to it. But if, in an evil moment, under the pressure of temptation, he should fall into sin, he will immediately repair to confession, in order, as soon as possible, to free himself from that evil which he so sincerely detests. Hatred of sin is, consequently, the surest pledge we can have in this world that we shall not die in mortal sin, but in the friendship of God; and therefore it forms an essential

part of the preparation for a happy death. Now, it is certain that the frequent thought of death is a most efficacious means of inspiring us with a thorough detestation of sin. For he who often thinks of death, and considers that it is sin that can make it the gate to hell for us instead of a passage to a better life, he looks upon sin as that which it really is, as the greatest misfortune, as the most detestable evil that can befall us, and thus hates and abominates it as he hates and abominates hell itself.

2. To a good preparation for death belongs, in the second place, *detachment from the things of this world.* Why? Because death separates us from all things of this earth, and it is the detachment from earthly things which makes the separation easy for us, and makes us disposed to accept death with resignation as coming from the hand of the Most High. Now, there is nothing which divests us of our attachment to the things of earth more than the thought of death—nothing that so inspires us with contempt of all worldly things. For we can hardly seriously think of death without being reminded of the perishableness of earthly goods, and without being more and more convinced of their nothingness. And as often as we seriously think of death we effect this separation from temporal things in spirit, and thus practically exercise ourselves in this detachment. This practice makes us perfect; it gives us a facility of detaching ourselves in reality, when the time comes. When we come to stand face to face with this awful separation we meet it with resignation as coming from the all-bountiful hand of our heavenly Father. Hence it is that the frequent thought of death arms us with resignation to the will of God, which is so essential a disposition for a happy death.

3. Finally, a necessary element of a true preparation for a happy death is the *longing for the eternal goods* of heaven. Among other advantages, this longing for heavenly goods disposes us to bear the pangs of suffering with Christian patience. For, he who has a true longing for an object steers his course courageously and fearlessly towards its attainment and does not easily allow himself to be deterred by difficulties and obstacles. Now, the dying Christian is conscious that heroic patience is not only the way to the eternal goods, to which he looks forward, but also the means of possessing those goods more perfectly and in greater abundance. If, then, he has a true yearning for the eternal happiness of heaven, he will bear his sufferings patiently; he will despise them in view of the infinite reward held out to him. But who does not see that this longing for the enjoyment of the heavenly goods of the life to come is the natural result of the frequent thought of death? For, as this thought brings home to us more and more forcibly the nothingness of earthly things, detaches our hearts from them, and teaches us to despise them, so in the same degree it impresses us with the infinite value of the eternal and imperishable goods of heaven, teaches us to esteem them above all things, and inspires us with an ardent longing for their possession.

The effect of the constant thought of death upon us, as you perceive, is a most salutary one. It contains all those elements which belong to a good preparation for a happy death. It begets hatred of sin, contempt of the things of this world, a true longing for things eternal. What better disposition for a happy death can we imagine? What surer pledge of eternal happiness can we possess? Be not afraid, then, to think of death. The fruit of this thought, as you see, is not sadness

and melancholy, but true joy and comfort, and consoling assurance.

Let us, then, beloved brethren, often think of our last moments here in this world. Think of death when you retire to rest at night. Think of death when you awake at night and everything around reminds you of the silence of the grave. Ask yourselves then: if I were summoned to death at this moment, should I be ready? Think of death when you prepare for confession; say to yourselves, this time I shall make my confession as if it were my last. A very suitable occasion of thinking of death is offered you every month on the Sunday on which the Confraternity of the Good Death holds its meeting. Do not allow this occasion to slip you. Take this salutary advice, my dear friends; often think of death. This practice will not make you die an hour sooner; but it will teach you to live well and prepare you for a happy death, which will be the glorious passage to the eternal joys of the Lord. Amen.

Last Sunday after Pentecost.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

"And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty."—Matt. xxiv. 30.

THESE words were spoken by our blessed Lord in reference to the last or general judgment. The first, or particular judgment, takes place immediately after death. But, although the eternal destiny of each one, whether it be everlasting bliss, or never-ending misery, is once for all decided by the sentence pronounced in the particular judgment, which cannot be reversed, yet important reasons, both on the part of God and on the part of man, require that a general judgment should be held, in which all men together should publicly appear before the judgment-seat of God and should be judged according to their works—a judgment in which not only the soul but also the body of man should find its punishment or reward; a judgment in which man, not only as an individual, but also as a member of human society, should meet with commendation or condemnation before all mankind, according as his influence has been for good or evil to his fellowmen. For the general judgment is the conclusion or summing up of the world's history. Besides, in the last judgment, Divine Providence, which in this world is not seldom ignored and often denied, must be fully vindicated before man, and all apparent contradictions clearly solved. Finally, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world, whose power and divinity, whose Church and doctrine, have been so

ignominiously disregarded; who Himself has been judged and condemned by the world—Jesus Christ, I say, must be publicly confessed and glorified by the whole world, so that all knees shall bow to Him in submission. Therefore God has given Him all judgment in heaven and on earth. Therefore He shall come in power and majesty. Such is the import of the last judgment. This tremendous ordeal we shall, according to the wish of the Church, take as the subject of our meditation to-day, and consider it in three different stages: (1) the *preliminary*, (2) the *process* itself, and (3) the *final issue* of the general judgment.

I. PRELIMINARY.

The preliminary of the last judgment, according to the teaching of the Gospel, will consist in the resurrection of the bodies and the separation of the good from the wicked.

1. *The resurrection of the bodies.* The sun and moon are darkened, and, as the Scripture says, the stars have fallen from heaven; all the works of man on the face of the earth are laid in ashes. Dense darkness envelops the earth, and death-like silence reigns over the universe. Suddenly the last trumpet sounds from end to end of the earth, summoning the dead to rise and come to judgment. The sound penetrates into the depth of the graves, rings through the courts of heaven, and reverberates with dread alarm through the prison of the damned. At this signal heaven, earth, and hell yield forth their respective portions of the human race. The dust of the graves begins to move; the scattered elements of the bodies unite even from the most distant spaces; the human limbs are reconstructed, and joined, and clothed with flesh and skin; the body of man is rebuilt.

But, the skeptic asks, *how* is this possible? Foolish query! Vain fear! How? He who first bestowed life, can He not restore it? He who first called forth matter from its nothingness, can He not gather its scattered particles from the four winds of the earth? Or, does the omniscient God not know where every atom of matter resides? Does He not hold within His grasp and under His control the minutest elements of the universe? Let no one ask, then, how this is possible; but let us be satisfied with the fact that God, in His infinite power and wisdom, can do what we cannot conceive.

The bodies of men are reformed. The gates of heaven are opened, and the souls of *the elect* descend in triumph. The bodies of God's chosen ones are resplendent in heavenly light and beauty—a marvel of God's power—clad in glory and majesty. "O welcome, welcome!" cries the ravished soul at the sight of the glorious body. "Welcome, faithful companion of my earthly pilgrimage! Oh, blessed are the toils and labors, blessed the privations, blessed the chastity, blessed the watchings, prayers, and self-denial, which have procured for me such a glorious companion!" And with unspeakable delight the blessed soul is again eternally wedded with the glorious body.

The gates of hell, too, are thrown open and the souls of *the damned* rush forth in wild confusion. Their bodies are hideous to look at, clothed with ghastly horror. For, as the Apostle says, "we shall all, indeed, rise again, but we shall not all be changed" (I. Cor. xv. 51). Oh, how the reprobate soul recoils at the sight of that hideous body! "Is that the body," it exclaims, "which I have so loved, which I have so carefully fostered and cherished, whose every appetite I have been so prompt in gratifying! Accursed be the pride and

vanity, accursed the avarice, accursed the intemperance, accursed the lust, accursed the debauchery, which have procured me such a companion!" In vain does the reprobate soul shrink back; in vain does it resist; an invincible power forces it into the filthy prison. And that was perhaps a young man, or young woman, adorned with all the graces of youth and beauty, courted and admired by all. But now, oh, how changed! What a frightful and ghastly spectacle! Behold that brow upon which the eternal curse of reprobation is imprinted; those eyes that glow with hellish fire; those bitter tears; that distorted visage! Hear the weeping and moaning and gnashing of teeth that now begin, never to end! And the noisome odor of the grave is blended with the stench of burning brimstone that ascends to heaven ever and anon. What a grim, ghastly, loathsome sight!

2. *The separation.* The resurrection, which I have just described, is the work of a moment. Scarcely has the dread trumpet sounded, when the newly arisen are seen hurrying as on the wings of the lightning from all quarters of the globe. And the angels of God, according to the Scriptures, are engaged in separating and marshalling them. What decides their rank here is not money, or influence, or education, or social standing. No; it is the good or evil which they have done in this life. The good, however poor, and ignorant, and despised they may have been, have their place assigned to them on the right. The wicked, with all their riches, and honors, and culture, are stationed upon the left. Oh, what dreadful disappointments do we find here! How the first are last, and the last first! How many unavailing tears are shed in this separation! There the child is forever separated from his parents, the friend from his friend, the brother from his brother,

the sister from her sister, the godless husband from his God-fearing wife! What blank disappointment! What grief! What despair! O my dear friend, if the last judgment surprised you at this moment, on which side would you stand? Would your place be upon the left? If so, I beseech you, then delay not, but hasten to be reconciled with God by a good confession of your sins!

With the resurrection of the bodies and the separation of the good from the wicked the preliminary of the last judgment is completed. Now follows the ordeal of the judgment itself.

II. PROCESS.

1. *The Judge's approach.* Each one has taken the place which was assigned to him according to his deserving. On the right of the awful tribunal stand the elect; on the left, the reprobate. All are in dread suspense, awaiting the coming of the Judge of the living and the dead.

Suddenly the resplendent *Cross of Christ*, high in the heavens, meets the gaze of all. With transports of joy the elect greet the approaching sign of salvation. It is the standard of Jesus Christ; that standard to which they have sworn and maintained their unwavering fidelity; the standard under which they fought so valiantly, and gained so many a glorious victory. It is the sign in which they placed their implicit confidence; the sign which they honored and loved with their whole heart; the sign which consoled them in their last agony, which they pressed to their dying lips; the sign which guided them safely to the land of promise. But this sign is beheld with horror by the damned. It reminds them of what the God-man has in vain done and suffered for them. It reminds them

of the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for them in vain. It is the standard to which they, too, have sworn, but which they have treacherously abandoned and exchanged for the standard of Satan. In this sign they no longer behold the sign of their salvation, but the sign of their eternal reprobation.

Immediately after the cross follows *the Judge*, borne upon a radiant cloud. Fairer than the morning dawn, more beauteous than the sun, with infinite power and majesty, surrounded by myriads of blessed spirits, the all-just Judge of the living and dead descends and takes His seat upon His awful throne, to exercise that judgment which was given Him by His Father before the constitution of the world. Then follows immediately—

2. *Manifestation of their deeds*, whether good or evil. *God is justified* before the whole human race. The sun of justice has arisen over all. The divine light, which beams from the face of the eternal Judge, enlightens not only what is manifest, but penetrates into the most secret recesses of their hearts. All things come to light, even the most secret thoughts. The good appears in all its beauty, and evil in all its hideousness. Now the sanctity of law is manifest; the power and efficacy of grace is revealed. The faithful co-operation of the good with the graces given them, and the stubborn resistance of the wicked become visible; the infinite love, and mercy, and long-suffering of God are shown forth. The providence and justice of God are asserted before all men.

The elect of God are glorified. As so many princes of the heavenly court, as the brethren of Jesus Christ, as the joint-heirs of His kingdom, like the stars of heaven, they shine in eternal, imperishable glory, and receive the homage of acknowledgment and admiration even from those who despised them in this life.

The wicked are confounded. Oh, who can describe the shame and confusion of the reprobate! Now the hateful brood of their vices, which they managed to conceal from the gaze of men in this life, will come to light—all their immorality, and dishonesty, and cruelty, and impiety, and sacrileges shall be laid bare! Now it is manifest how innumerable graces they abused. Now all their deceit and hypocrisy are exposed. O God, what do I behold there! A man who was looked upon as a model of honesty, who enjoyed the fullest confidence of his fellow-men—a thief, a defrauder, the oppressor of widows and orphans! A young man, who was looked upon as a pattern of correctness—a seducer, a lecher, a victim of secret and nameless vice! A young woman, who distinguished herself by piety, who was so often seen approaching the holy sacraments—a hypocrite, who deceived her confessor and profaned the sacraments!

At the sight of such shame and confusion, in the face of so many heinous crimes, *the just will praise the justice of God*, which, like the lightning of heaven quivering through the lurid clouds, smites the reprobate. "Then shall the just stand with great constancy," says the Holy Ghost, "against those that have afflicted them, and taken away their labors" (Wis. v. 1).

The reprobate shall arise in fury against each other. In their rage and despair they shall hurl the wildest abuse and curses upon the accomplices of their crimes: "It was thou, O shameless seducer, who didst rob me of my innocence! It was thou, O infamous woman, who didst enkindle the flame of impurity in my heart! It was thou, O unnatural father, thou, O cruel mother, who by thy impious example, by thy cruel indulgence, by thy reckless neglect, hast brought upon me this eternal misfortune!" Woe, woe to those who have

abused their position and authority, to rob their fellow-men of their innocence and of the fear of God, have seduced them to infidelity or immorality!

But more terrible still are *the reproaches of their own conscience.* "Oh," they say to themselves, "how easily couldst thou have escaped this unspeakable calamity! Thou hadst only to observe God's commandments; grace was not wanting to thee; only a little good will was required! And the millions of the elect! They had the same nature, the same passions, the same temptations, the same dangers; yea, perhaps even greater than thou! Oh, how foolishly hast thou acted! Thou hast preferred the unjust possession of earthly goods to the eternal, imperishable goods of heaven! Thou hast chosen the momentary pleasures of the flesh in preference to the everlasting joys of heaven! Thou hast exchanged the enjoyment of eternal bliss for the gratification of thy revenge! Thou hast bartered the eternal possession and beatific vision of God for the illusion of infidelity and false enlightenment! And how often did thy conscience not warn thee! But thou wast deaf to its admonitions, and thou well deservest thy lot!" Overwhelmed with the excess of shame and confusion, they cry out to the mountains to fall upon them and to the hills to cover them (Luke xxiii. 30).

III. ISSUE.

1. *Sentence.* Now the eternal Judge arises and turns to the reprobate. His eyes gleam as the lightning of heaven; His face glows with holy indignation. With a voice of thunder, that shakes the earth to its centre, He pronounces sentence upon the damned: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. xxv. 41).

Depart from Me: between you and Me all ties of friendship are rent forever. I am no longer your Good Shepherd, no longer your friend, no longer your Father; My Mother is no longer your Mother; My saints are no longer your brethren; My angels no longer your friends! There is no further communion between us; but only eternal hate! Depart from Me, you *cursed!* Accursed shall be your bodies, which shall be tortured forever; accursed your souls, which shall be a prey to eternal remorse; accursed your understanding, which shall never conceive a holy thought; accursed your will, which shall nevermore taste the sweetness of love; accursed all your senses, which shall never procure the least pleasure for you! Depart from Me into *eternal fire!* A furnace of fire shall be your resting place; flames of fire shall be your food and drink; glowing fire shall be your couch; the fallen spirits shall be your everlasting companions! Heaven and earth are My witness that this was not My will. What could I have done for My vineyard, that I have not done? Behold My hands and feet, pierced for your sake. It was My love for you that has inflicted these wounds upon Me. Behold My head, which was crowned with thorns for your sake. Behold My body, which for love of you was covered with a thousand wounds! In vain; with ingratitude and hate have you requited My love. So, then, let it be; depart from Me, you cursed, into eternal fire.

2. *Execution.* The sentence of the damned is pronounced, and forthwith it is put into execution. The glorious Judge, the King of heaven and earth, is borne aloft to the firmament of heaven, surrounded by His angels and the legions of His glorious saints, chanting the triumphal hymn of praise and thanksgiving, which will resound in the courts of heaven for all eternity.

Before them is unfolded the heavenly Jerusalem, and in its centre the glorious throne of the thrice Holy Trinity. Thus they enter into the joy of the Lord.

With the steadfast gaze of despair the reprobate behold their triumphal entrance. There a child gets the last glimpse of his parents, a friend of his friend, a brother of his sister, a husband of his wife, transfigured in glory. God alone knows the thrill of anguish that runs through the bosom of the reprobate at this sight. The fiery gulf yawns open beneath their feet; they precipitate into the eternal flames; the abyss closes over them. The terrible ordeal is finished; eternity has begun; time is no more.

For us, beloved brethren, the last sentence has not yet been pronounced. Eternity has not yet dawned upon us; we still have time to repair all. Let us, then, make use of the precious time that God has given us, especially of the holy season of Advent, which is approaching, to avert the dread calamity of judgment without mercy, and to secure for ourselves a favorable sentence on the last day. Amen.

END OF VOLUME I.

252.
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